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of
Curgenven.

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MRS. CURGENVEN
OF CURGENVEN

VOL. I.

MRS. CURGENVEN

OF CURGENVEN

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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MRS. CURGENVEN.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE TERRACE.

'Excuse me—*I* am Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven.'

'I beg your pardon, madam, I did not say—*of* Curgenven.'

'There is but one Mrs. Curgenven, whether of Curgenven or of anywhere else. Perhaps you meant the late Mrs. Percival?'

'I did mean the late Mrs. Percival Curgenven. I make a thousand apologies.'

'There can be but one Mrs. Curgenven. If my husband had had nine brothers, and all had married, there would have been a Mrs. Jack, and a Mrs. Tom, and a Mrs. Will, and so and so; but I alone would have been Mrs. Curgenven. You understand. I do not care about this myself, other people are more particular. I do not make a point of this, others

do; that is why I have spoken, to prevent your falling into the mistake again, which in certain quarters might give deadly offence. If we are anything at all in this world, let us be exact.'

The lady who thus put to rights the person who had addressed her, was tall, stately, good-looking. The person addressed was small, undignified, ugly—a man with a face like a pug dog. Who she was the reader has been informed by her own lips. He was Mr. Physic, solicitor, agent for the Curgenven estate as well as for two or three other properties in the neighbourhood.

It was certainly strange that Mr. Physic should have been for many years associated on certain terms of intimacy with the leading families around, and yet have never learned that one canon of social intitulation which Mrs. Curgenven now laid down for him with emphasis in a manner he was not likely to forget. But it is the case that there are persons who perceive nothing, and who must be taught with a hammer.

The estates of the gentry in the neighbourhood were not large, and one agent was able to manage three or four. This was a saving to the pockets of the landowners of a hundred or a hundred and fifty pounds each. It was true they grumbled. Each thought his affairs were not attended to with sufficient promptitude, and talked of either managing them himself

or putting them into other hands, but no one did it. Each landowner knew his own incompetence, and Mr. Physic knew very well that there was no one in the district to compete with him, and was not rendered uneasy at this restlessness. He was a valuable man, each squire admitted that. He had qualified as a solicitor, and had the law of landlord and tenant at his fingers' ends. He drew the leases himself, as he was competent to do so. He had an intimate acquaintance with the prices in the building trade, and could draw up a specification for a tender. He was dexterous with compasses, and could make plans, and so do away with the necessity for calling in an architect. Yet he was not liked. He was suspected of sharp practice; every man who employed him believed that he was 'done' by him, yet thought it worth his while to submit rather than run the risk of getting into worse hands.

The school-children were being given a treat of tea and sports in the grounds of Curgenven, as Mrs. Curgenven was the general manageress of the Sunday school, and supervised the needlework in the National school.

Tables formed of boards laid on trestles stood on the terrace, covered with white cloths, and studded with plates piled up with cake, bread-and-jam, muffins, and adorned with glass celery-holders full of flowers. The children were eating as

hard as they could, producing with their mouths a sound like the crumpling of newspapers. The servants of Curgenven were running about, assisted by the pupil teachers, ministering to the wants of the children.

'Stop, Phœbe!' exclaimed Mrs. Curgenven. 'That child has already drunk six cups. She'll be ill if she takes a seventh.' Then she returned to Mr. Physic.

'Yes—what about the late Mrs. Percival?'

'Nothing more than this, ma'am, that it is a pity for young Master Justin that his mother is not alive. There is really no one to control him.'

'That depends on what sort of person she was. I never knew her. If a man marries out of the country, heaven alone knows what he may pick up. That will do, Lambert. There is no necessity for wasting coals.' The last words were addressed to her husband, Captain Curgenven, who was engaged on the boiler that supplied hot water for the teapots, and which was planted at a corner of the terrace near a tap whence water could be drawn.

'Dear, dear! what a mess there will be to-morrow! Really, Lambert, you need not have strewn the coals about in this fashion. One would think you were made of money to be so extravagant, and to have an army of gardeners to clear up the litter after you. Look here! Do not you see the children

have had enough? There is little Bessy Collop has had six cups of tea already, and Phœbe, who never thinks—who has no more brains than a peacock—was giving her a seventh when I interfered. Let the fire out. Don't boil water when water is no longer wanted. And such lumps of coals too!'

'My dear, I suppose the maids want hot water to wash up with.'

'But you don't suppose that they'll wash up on the terrace, do you? Let them attempt it. Where's papa?'

'I saw him talking to Dalby, the school-master, just now.'

The clear, searching eyes of Mrs. Curgenven ranged the terrace.

'I see him,' she said. 'Now mind—no more coals,' then off she went to her father, the rector of the parish, the Rev. James Pamphlet, a tall, elderly man with white whiskers very full, and standing out as if each hair were electrified. He wore the most starched of collars and the most glossy of coats. On his face sat a perpetual smile, and he turned his head from side to side and nodded urbanely to every pupil teacher and parishioner whose eye he encountered, and he continued nodding after each greeting as though his head were hung on a wire, and so nicely balanced, that it did not recover its equipoise at once.

'Papa, the children have nearly finished. Lambert is going

to show them his mechanical contrivances; he will require a few minutes for winding them up. So, when they have done tea, let the children have a short service to keep them occupied.'

'Certainly, Jane.'

'Moreover, if they are withdrawn and in church, it will allow the maids to clear away the tea-things.'

'Exactly—I will give them an address.'

'Papa!—not too long. Is it really necessary that there should be one? A short service, some hymns, and all that sort of thing, just sufficient to keep them out of the way when they are not wanted.'

'I think it advisable—imperative that I should give an address. Dalby is local agent for one of the county papers, and I should not like a notice of this treat to appear without some mention of me and my address.'

'Very well, papa, don't make it too long. I suppose the children may sing something as they march to church.'

'Don't ask me. If you wish it, do it, but nothing doctrinal, you understand. Tell Dalby to set them something to sing that has sentiment, not meaning in it. I don't wish to appear as a party man, and there is no saying, if they sang something with doctrine of any sort in it, it might be taken up and made a party matter.'

'Why,' suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Curgenven, 'dear me! That surely is Esther Morideg! Mr. Dalby—here! This instant. How comes this about? Here is Esther Morideg among the scholars. She has not made her proper number of attendances, of that I am very sure.'

Mrs. Curgenven had singled out a dark-eyed, red-haired girl at the table.

'Stand up, Esther. What audacity to put in an appearance here! Mr. Dalby, can you inform me how many attendances this girl has made? She is most irregular. Has not got into the second standard yet—and at her age! Disgraceful, Mr. Dalby. Has she been reported to the relieving officer?'

'Yes, ma'am, the list of attendances is given every month.'

'And he has done nothing?'

'No, ma'am. At least, he lays it before the School Attendance Committee at Liskeard.'

'And that, of course, does nothing?'

'Nothing at all, ma'am.'

'Of course not, they never do. But that is no reason why I should not. There is no excuse for Esther's non-attendance, is there?'

'Not that I am aware of.'

'Then, Esther, tie up your mug in your kerchief and be off

with you home. Captain Curgenven and myself did not invite those children who are irregular, disorderly, and no credit to the school. We are encouraging non-attendance, idle ways, if we pass this over. Go! You shall not see what Captain Curgenven is about to show to the other children. You shall not run races, nor play games, nor scramble for nuts and lollipops. Go, and then, perhaps, another year you will learn to be more regular in your attendance.'

The girl began to cry.

Then a hand was put into that of Mrs. Curgenven. It was that of her own daughter Alice, a fair, sweet girl of sixteen.

'Dear mamma, do let Esther stay. She has had her tea. I am sure she will be more regular in future.'

'No!' said the lady. 'Discipline must be maintained. What is the good of our having schools, and paying to maintain them, if the children are not sent to them?'

'If you love me, mamma!'

'I love you very well, Alice, but I have my duties to perform. No—it is of no use your running off to get papa to intercede. In these matters I am inflexible.' The girl had run to her father, and was pleading with him. He was engaged still on the boiler, raking out the fire, and was without his coat. Captain Curgenven never could be brought to a sense of what was proper to his position. His wife's

colour mounted when she perceived that he was in his shirt-sleeves.

'Really, Lambert, this is too provoking. No, Lambert, it is not of the slightest use your putting in a plea for Esther Morideg. It seems to me as if the whole world would go into a dishevelled, slouching, happy-go-lucky condition but for me and the like of me. Some one must make a stand for order and decency. Do, for pity's sake, put on your coat, and say not a word for Esther. Goodness gracious me! What has that fellow Dalby set the children to sing? Alice—run and stop it. This will never do. They are marching to church with "I would I were in monkey-land, and swinging by my tail." Papa will be annoyed. This is worse than a doctrinal hymn. Run, Alice—stop it before the first children get into the porch swinging by their tails. One must do everything oneself, no one is to be trusted. I did think the school-master had more sense. It will upset papa seriously for fear what people might say, and lest it should get into the papers. Don't laugh, Lambert—it is no laughing matter. There—do leave the boiler alone. You go and get your mechanism wound up and set agoing. And mind, Lambert, I won't have you cutting silly jokes with the children, and making yourself ridiculous. Please not to forget that you are Curgenven of Curgenven, and don't leave

it to me alone to maintain the dignity of the family and of the name.'

As Mrs. Curgenven turned to direct her energies on another point, she encountered a wild-looking woman, with tanned face, a scarlet kerchief about her throat, and an apron covering her black gown.

'Lady!' said this woman, 'have you sent my Esther away?'

'Oh! Mrs. Morideg, you here! Now I can tell you my mind plainly. Yes, I have dismissed your grand-daughter. She came here under false pretences. She was here as a scholar, and she is an ignoramus. She is not an attendant at school, but a stay-away. What do you expect will become of the girl in this world or the next, unless she goes through her standards?'

'I could not always spare her, ma'am.'

'That is a mere excuse. Where there is a will there is a way. You do not value education. You know very well that I offered to pay her school pence if you would send her regularly. As the School Attendance Committee won't do its duty, I must. And I tell you, there is no treat for those who are not regular scholars.'

'Please, lady, pass it over this once. Esther be a-crying, and her has been shamed afore all the school.'

'I cannot pass it over. Let this be a salutary lesson.'

'But, lady, look round. How grand and beautiful it all is in the park and gardens. You see that every day.'

'I have been through my standards.'

'And Esther never sees aught but the moors.'

'She has not yet got into the second standard. She is not qualified to see anything else.'

'Instead of this day being to her one of happiness, it's one of sorrow; and her's looked forward to it half the year. Pray, sweet lady darling, let Esther come back.'

'When I have said a word I do not withdraw it. I am sorry—but some one must make a stand. If the relieving officer won't look up the non-attendances, and the Attendance Committee won't prosecute, I *must* do my duty.'

Mrs. Curgenven was not an unkind woman, but she was a woman who had a strong sense of her obligations. Brought up by a feeble father, married to a volatile husband, she had come to regard herself as the sole prop that sustained the moral, religious, and social order in the place. When she had made up her mind that a certain course of action was right, she did it, regardless of dissuasion and comment.

As she looked at the woman before her, she was struck with the peculiarity of her eyes, which were as though double-irised. These strange eyes were now fixed on her, and their peculiarity sent unwittingly a thrill through her. She could

understand how that Thomasine Morideg was said to have the evil eye, and be able to 'overlook,' that is to blight, men and beasts by the glance of these strange eyes.

The woman, looking at her, put her hands behind her back and untied her apron, held it before her, and shook it.

'I had good thoughts of you, lady,' she said, 'and kindly will, and I shake them out as I shake the dust from my apron.'

Then she turned her apron and bound it about her waist again, and said—

'And—lady—as I turn this apron so do I turn your fortune as was up to-day into down to-morrow. All your good fortune be gone from you and be changed into evil.'

She stepped aside and walked away, before Mrs. Curgenven had recovered from her surprise. In her place stood a stranger.

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE FACE.

Mrs. Curgenven had not observed this person before, owing to the servants passing and repassing, the volunteers flying about and running against each other in their efforts to make themselves useful in clearing the tables. These volunteers were farmers' daughters and wives, glad to oblige the wife of their squire. The stranger was a dark-haired, sallow woman, of about her own age, near thirty-five, with large, intelligent, expressive eyes, and with the lower portion of her face beautifully formed. Mrs. Curgenven could not recollect having ever seen her before, and the face was not one which, when once seen, was likely to be forgotten.

The first question the squiress put to herself referred to the position in life occupied by this stranger, that she might regulate her conduct towards her accordingly. Social standing was all-in-all to Mrs. Curgenven. She addressed those of her

own rank in one fashion, those of a lower position in another fashion, and with *nuances* in her mode of address nicely adjusted to the several gradations on the social scale of those to whom she spoke.

Was this person before her a lady, a *real* lady, or not? The stranger did not look in the least like a farmer's wife. The delicate texture of the skin, the ivory complexion, were not such as were found among those who face all weathers on market days. The delicate lips, the fine chin, spoke of culture. Mrs. Curgenven studied the dress of the stranger. It was sad in colour, simple, well-made, but not fashionable. It was distinctly the dress of a lady, and as distinctly that of a poor lady. The keenly critical eye of Mrs. Curgenven detected signs of wearing out.

But how was it possible that a lady should thus intrude uninvited on private grounds?

Mrs. Curgenven assumed an air of stiffness, threw a keep-your-distance look into her eyes, and said, 'May I ask whom I have the pleasure——'

'Mrs. Curgenven.'

The squiress made a slight bow.

'I *am* Mrs. Curgenven.'

'You misunderstand me.' The strange lady looked round, and—possibly without premeditation—drew off her left glove.

The lady of Curgenven House saw a delicate hand, and on the third finger was the golden wedding-hoop.

No one was near; no one could hear what was said. Those who were on the terrace were engaged with mugs and teapots, with empty cake-trays, and half-eaten dishes of bread-and-butter.

'You misunderstand me,' repeated the stranger, '*I* am Mrs. Curgenven.'

'Mrs.—er—er—what Curgenven? I beg your pardon, Mrs. er—er——'

'Mrs. Curgenven,' answered the strange lady. 'My husband is Lambert Curgenven.'

The blood rushed into the face of the squiress. She drew back a step, looked at the speaker from head to foot.

'This insolence——'

'Excuse me, it is the truth. Call Lambert.'

To hear her husband, the Squire of Curgenven, a Deputy-Lieutenant, a Justice of the Peace, called by his Christian name by one not authorized by tie of blood to do so, completely upset Mrs. Curgenven's judgment. She beckoned to Mr. Physic, whom she saw at some distance, to come to her aid. There boiled up in her mind a feeling of wrath against her husband. This was what came of taking off his coat before folk! of poking and raking coals under a boiler! No wonder that——

'Stay,' said the strange lady. 'Do not let us have a scene. I did not come prepared for that; I do not desire it. I had no intention of doing more than show myself, that Lambert might be prepared to act according to what is just and right.'

'How dare you speak of Captain Curgenven in this manner?' exclaimed the squiress, usually a cool and collected person, but now completely thrown off her balance by the audacity of the personage before her.

'I have the best possible right—I am his wife.'

Mrs. Curgenven beckoned vehemently, and Physic almost ran to her side.

'Mr. Physic, call the constable; there is here a person—either a lunatic or sent to insult me—that must be removed at once.' She turned to the stranger, 'Will you go? or shall I call in the police?'

'I will not now leave till Captain Curgenven has been summoned.'

Mr. Physic looked from one speaker to the other, he did not in the least comprehend what was the situation.

'It would have been better,' said the stranger, 'that this matter were settled quietly. It was wrong in me, perhaps, to come here on such an occasion, but I thought to take advantage of the crowd and see Curgenven, about which I had heard, and

to have the chance of meeting my husband, that he might be aware I was alive and prepared to assert my rights.'

An expression of astonishment and perplexity passed over Mr. Physic's face, he struck his hands together audibly.

'Madam!' said he, 'here come all the children and school teachers back from church. Good gracious! this is not a matter for such a moment.'

'I will have this insolent person removed. Call the constable, Tregaskis, I saw him somewhere on the terrace. On my own grounds to receive such an outrage! It is too monstrous!'

'I think,' said Physic, 'I really think, ma'am, we'd better not have the police here. I have no doubt this—this—lady will see the advisability of retiring.'

'I will go,' said the stranger, 'and make no disturbance at all. It is not my wish to do so. Your position, madam, is a painful one, and I would spare you confusion as much as possible, but I insist on being brought face to face with Captain Curgenven. You shall judge for yourself.'

Mrs. Curgenven interrupted her. 'It is unseemly; it is an impertinence. You shall not be brought face to face with the captain. I absolutely forbid it. If you do not go at once, of your own accord, I will have you removed by force.'

'I am not going till I have seen him or he has seen me.

Permit me to seat myself on that garden bench. I will speak to no one. I will remain perfectly quiet, and then bring the captain this way—where he can confront me.'

'Call the constable,' said the squiress, imperiously.

'Allow me to entreat you,' urged Mr. Physic. 'May I have a word in private?'

'Certainly.' Mrs. Curgenven stepped on one side, and the agent attended her. She had reared her head and stiffened her back. Her colour was heightened. She was unaccustomed to be browbeaten and insulted—she, the squiress, the rector's daughter! And this insult was so gross, so unutterably repulsive.

'If you will suffer me to advise, ma'am,' said the agent. 'The first thing to be now considered is how to avoid a scandal.'

'The woman is mad. She has broken out of an asylum.'

'Possibly. But if what she says be heard, the tongues of the whole neighbourhood will be set wagging.'

'What do I care? The woman is a maniac. Who gives the slightest credence to the ravings of a lunatic?'

'It will save both yourself and Captain Curgenven a great deal of annoyance if you humour her craze—supposing it to be a craze——'

'It is a craze. I am surprised, Mr. Physic, that you should allow there is any doubt in the matter.'

'There is no saying, ma'am. Excuse my speaking what may be very unpleasant, but something may have occurred in the past for which no doubt Captain Curgenven is much grieved, and which may—I only say may—have caused this craze on the part of the female who is now occasioning unpleasantness. What we must endeavour to do is to get her away without any disturbance, and inquire into the matter afterwards.'

'But conceive!' exclaimed the incensed lady. 'If what she asserts were true, what would *I* be? It is preposterous. She is mad. She is raving.'

'And a maniac is best managed by humouring. Let her seat herself as she proposes. Let Captain Curgenven be brought near, where she can see him and he can see her.'

'Then there will be a scene. She will do the wildest, most outrageous acts.'

'Trust me. I will have the police brought near. If she does, she shall be removed at once, but I do not think it. I will, with your permission, soothe her, and persuade her to go.'

'But who is she? What is she?'

'I never saw her in my life before.'

'And you know nothing about her? She can't have sprung out of the fountain, or dropped out of a rook's nest.'

'I have a suspicion.'

'What?' asked Mrs. Curgenven, turning sharply on the agent.

He hesitated, regretted what he had said, and endeavoured to retreat from it. 'No—it is not right to say that. I assure you, ma'am, I have never seen her before.'

'And you know nothing about her?'

'Nothing.'

'Very well, I yield.'

Mrs. Curgenven and the agent turned to where they had quitted the stranger, and found that she had withdrawn and had quietly seated herself on the bench she had previously indicated. She was drawing on again her left glove.

A buzz of voices was approaching, above it rang out an occasional word of command in a hard masculine voice. The children were marching two and two from church to the terrace, and, as the singing had been put a stop to, were talking together in procession.

'Monkey-land' had been too much for the rector. He was afraid lest it should get into the papers. Accordingly in church he had scribbled on a fly-leaf of his hymnal, 'No singing on leaving church, please,' and had torn it out and passed the order to the school-master.

The strange lady was seated on the terrace in a garden-chair. The twilight from the north lighted her pearly-white face.

The brows were contracted and the lips tightly drawn together. She looked dreamily at the landscape.

The park-like grounds, of the most velvety grass-clothed sweeps, were studded with noble oaks, beech, and Scotch pines. The woods became dense about the base of the moors that soared up into the pure sky, crested with granite, and the foliage rolled part way up their sides. A stream, falling in foam over a granite lip, passed in a series of cascades through the woods, and spread below the lawn into a lake tenanted by wild-fowl.

But the stranger did not look at the distant landscape, her eyes observed the house, the terrace, the gardens and shrubberies. The house was large, a Queen Anne mansion of grey stone with granite dressings, and tall windows telling of stately rooms within.

Presently her ear caught a voice—a cheery voice shouting. 'Now then, children, there are prizes for all those who have been good, and there are also some wonderful contrivances of mine I am going to show you. As to the prizes, you shall each choose what suits you best, according to the number of good-conduct and attendance marks you have, and by your standards. Come, follow me!'

Her delicate lips quivered as with pain, as she heard the voice, then she turned and looked at the speaker. It was

Captain Curgenven, in a short coat, with his cap off, held in his hand, waving it to the scholars who were overflowing the terrace, along with the pupil teachers, district visitors, the school-master, the Scripture reader, and the mission woman.

'Now then, come along!' shouted the captain, and he turned and faced the strange lady who had risen from her seat.

His eyes rested upon her for a moment without inquiry in them. There were a twinkle of fun and a glow of good-humour in his eyes. But slowly the spark went out, and the glow disappeared. The whole expression of his face changed. His colour faded, and a vague look of fear stole over his features.

For full a minute the captain stood speechless, his lips parted, looking blankly at the strange woman, the children, the monitresses, the school-master, the Scripture reader, the mission woman, and Mrs. Curgenven standing by. Then slowly—drawing a long breath—he gasped: 'Good Lord! Resa!'

'Lambert!'

The captain raised a trembling hand to his brow, that which held his cap, and retained it there. 'Resa! what is to be done? I thought—I thought you were dead.'

Then he slowly turned and staggered away, and the school-

children, the monitresses, the sewing-mistress, the parochial helpers the mission woman who worked on one line, and the Scripture reader who worked across it, the agent, the schoolmaster—all trooped after him to see what was to be seen and to get what was to be given.

CHAPTER III.

A RACE.

Captain Curgenven's step was usually firm, and he walked with a swing, as though pacing the quarter-deck with a sense of authority. But now he walked with uncertainty, as doubtful in which direction to go; there was no spring in his step, but limpness in the knees. He still held the cap in one hand, he forgot to put it on his head. His steps turned in the direction of the bungalow.

The bungalow was a structure the captain had erected at a little distance from the house, and was of wood. It contained a billiard- and a smoking-room, also a workshop. Here the captain was wont to spend much of his time. He had a mechanical talent, and delighted in making little mills turned by water, and scarecrows set in motion by wind, and jacks to be made active by the rush of smoke up a chimney, and absurd toys for the tea-table to be set in movement by the steam from the kettle.

All these fruits of the ingenuity of Captain Curgenven were useless, though serving to amuse for a few minutes. Mrs. Curgenven had taken on her at first to remonstrate with her husband for spending his time and thought upon trifles, but had finally submitted, in deference to her father's opinion, who had represented to her that 'if he did anything of practical utility he would run counter to the interests, the habits, or the prejudices of some one or other, and that would give rise to animadversion. Whereas now,' said the Reverend James Pamphlet, 'no one can say anything against what he invents and executes, which is a great—nay, it is everything.'

Captain Curgenven reeled along the path to the bungalow with the swarm of children, teachers, and parochial odds and ends after him, laughing, talking, in flutter of expectation and jubilant hope. That is to say, the children who were to receive prizes were laughing and hopeful; the Scripture reader and the mission woman maintained a professional solemnity, the first because it was sinful, the second because it was indecorous to laugh; and the school-master remained grave, lest any tokens of levity should sap the foundations of his authority by letting the school-children see that he was subject to like weaknesses as themselves.

Mrs. Curgenven and Mr. Physic followed, the former perplexed—not knowing what to make of her husband's

change of manner and of colour, more than half disposed to believe that he was performing antics, indulging in low buffoonery, and hugging herself with the resolution that for this as well as the waste of coals, and the working in shirt-sleeves, she must take him to task in a curtain lecture.

Mr. Physic followed, interested to see how this strange incident would end.

Mrs. Curgenven was far removed from attributing importance to the appearance and assertion of the strange lady. She concluded in her mind that this individual was either insane, and therefore to be pitied, or was an impostor seeking to extort money, and was therefore to be treated with severity.

There are certain self-evident verities on which all sciences are built up. The geometrician assumes that things that are equal to the same thing are equal also to one another, and the metaphysician that the *ego*, the I, myself, is a sentient unit.

So did Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven assume as an unassailable and self-evident axiom that she was Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven. The corollary to which was, that in the entire universe there could by no possibility be—could not be imagined in the region of fancy to be—another Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven.

Presently the captain became aware that many feet were

tramping the gravel after him, and he turned and stood, with arms stiffly extended, cap in hand, looking at those who followed.

The tail had grown.

The sidesmen and churchwardens had joined it. The leaders of the Band of Hope and of the Church of England Temperance Society, the organist of the church, the promotress of mothers' meetings, had fallen in. The police-constable, Mr. Tregaskis, seeing that the guests, old and young, were drifting in one direction, also joined to form a link in the chain, a joint in the tail. The sexton, the clerk, the choir, every member in the elaborately articulated and perfectly organized parochial system—organized for the sake of organization, with no other object than organization—was in the coil that wound after the captain, and was suddenly arrested by his turning and facing it.

In the distance appeared the rector, passing his fingers through his white whiskers, stalking down the churchyard path.

Several of the servant-maids of the hall in their white caps and aprons ran from the kitchen. They had removed the tea-things and wished to see the children receive their prizes.

James, the footman, also followed in plush and white

stockings, walking with as much gravity and dignity as the rector.

Almost the sole person who had not been caught by the current and drawn after Captain Curgenven to the bungalow was the strange lady. She had not resumed her seat on the garden bench, but was walking down the drive to the lodge gates, turning her back on the festive scene.

Outside the gates were Thomasine Morideg and Esther.

'What,' said the old woman, 'be you turned away? Has her said, "You shan't come in. Get you gone, you're none fit to be wi' me"? Be easy i' mind. I've turned her luck again' her.'

The captain stood facing the troop of children, women, and men that had been following him. He looked vacantly from one to another, as though he did not understand the signification of the rout at his heels. He saw his wife and Physic, and his lips moved. He was trying to articulate something, but could produce no sound. He gesticulated with his cap. Then he perceived the police-constable, and at once turned and ran towards the bungalow.

The boys of the school uttered a whoop! and set off at a scamper, followed by the girls at a trot, and the pupil teachers, school-master, Scripture reader, and mission woman at an amble. A budget of tracts escaped the pocket of the Scrip-

ture reader, and fluttered about and then fell on the gravel, where they were trampled by the feet of the children, the churchwardens, and the district visitors, deaf to their appeals, 'Where are you going?' 'Are you converted?' 'How are your poor souls?'

The black veil of the mission woman unfurled and streamed behind her as she careered along, like the pennon of a buccaneer that gave no quarter.

Mrs. Curgenven, seeing the tracts on the gravel, exclaimed, 'How can the captain so forget himself as to lead them a paper-chase?'

Captain Curgenven reached the bungalow, dashed inside, shut and locked the door in the face of his pursuers. At once the swarm accumulated about the entrance. The children whispered, and laughed, and contended with one another which came first in order for choosing the prizes.

One of the district visitors, whose duty it was in the highly organized parish to see after missionary contributions, had an S.P.G. mission-box in one pocket and a C.M.S. box in the other, each with coppers in it, and as she ran with the children she rattled, but now that the race was at an end the rattle ceased.

'Our squire be an uncommon sort of a gent,' said one of the churchwardens; 'don't y' think so, Jukes?'

'Well,' answered the other, 'I should say, Boales, as he made hisself too common.'

'It's them nautical goings-on,' said Boales. 'Sailors haven't no proper respect for themselves as has other folk.'

'You see he waren't born to it,' said Jukes.

'That's just about it,' agreed Boales.

The rector, walking in stately solemnity from the church, as though unable to rouse himself from the ecstatic trance produced by his own eloquence in his address to the children, raised his white eyebrows, and as he put his hand to the wicket-gate from the church-path into the Curgenven grounds, said, 'Tish! tish! there is my son-in-law at his nonsense again. I wish he could be taught to wear the wisdom-cap. He is a boy in spirits, and he forgets that he has a position, as having married my daughter, that he has to keep up. Should it please heaven to invest me in apron and gaiters, it would pain me inexpressibly to know that my son-in-law was capable of running—running with school-children.'

Then he turned slowly round and faced the church. 'I wonder that the ringers are not giving us a peal. I fear they are wetting their palms.'

The throng and noise about the bungalow door increased. Boys who were not on the doorstep thrust off such as were,

and stepped into their places. Others had filled their pockets with burs and were tangling them in the hair of the girls. The mission woman and the Scripture reader, thrust together in the throng, glowered at each other, and prepared to plunge into controversy, when Mrs. Curgenven called to the school-master, 'Don't you think, Mr. Dalby, it would be as well to set the children to sing till Captain Curgenven is ready for them?'

'Yes, madam, but the rector was displeased when I set them to sing when going to church.'

'Oh! that was quite another matter. There is a time and there is a place for everything. "Monkey-land" will do here, but not in the churchyard. Can you not see that, or must you be taught it? Really,' grumbled Jane Curgenven to herself, 'the obtuseness of some people is astounding.'

'Very well, madam, as you wish it. Children! Attention!'

In the stillness produced by his call, sounded the twang of the pitch-key, and then he began, 'Do—re—mi—,' when from the bungalow rang the report of a pistol.

The school-master did not start the song. The children ceased to quarrel. All held their breath.

'Bless me! has anything happened?' exclaimed Mr. Physic, and elbowed his way forward.

'It is nothing,' said Mrs. Curgenven, 'but the captain at

his pranks again, just to frighten or amuse the children till he has all in readiness for them. He is full of tricks.'

The agent did not seem satisfied with the lady's explanation. He continued with haste and impatience to force his way to the door; he drove his body between the snarling mission woman and snapping Scripture reader, thrust the children aside with roughness, and only turned to beckon to his aid the churchwarden Jukes. 'Here! your burly help!'

Then a tall boy, with a blue ribbon in his buttonhole, came round the corner.

'Please! I've climbed up into the window, and looked in.'

'Well, and what have you seen?' asked Physic, almost fiercely.

'Please, sir, the captain is lying on the floor.'

'Here!' he hastily signed to Jukes, and drove his shoulder against the door. 'Stand off, you young hounds!' he said, and kicked the boys away. 'Clear from this, will you? School-master, call off your cubs.'

Then Jukes came to his aid, and drove his great muscular shoulder against the door, burst it open, and was within the bungalow next moment along with Physic, and a motley throng of school-children, monitors, visitors, Scripture reader, mission woman, sidesmen, all pressing and jamming one

another in the door, in their eagerness to see whatever was to be seen.

What was to be seen was Captain Curgenven's body on the floor. He had blown out his brains. The explosion had set some of the machinery in motion—a parrot was swinging on a perch, opening and shutting its beak; a little Mr. Gladstone was chopping at a tree; a mill was turning its wheel and pattering hammers on a piece of glass.

The rector was coming along leisurely, and with dignity, when the second churchwarden rushed up to him with—

'Lord, sir! the captain has shot himself!'

The rector stood still for a moment, gasped, and said—

'Good heavens! what will people say?'

Then from the church tower burst forth the merry peal of bells, for the men by this time had wetted the palms of their hands. The old ivied tower reeled with the vibration, and was as though it laughed and staggered in its laughter over the changes and chances of the mortal life of foolish men.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE TRAP.

Mr. Physic was driving towards his home along the high-road; his face was troubled, for his mind was in agitation. He had managed the Curgenven property for the captain ever since the latter had succeeded to the estate, and the captain had left it pretty much in his hands to do with it what he liked. Spasmodically, at long intervals, Lambert Curgenven had declared he would go into the accounts, overhaul the vouchers, and satisfy himself that everything was as it should be. He had not only made this declaration, he had begun to carry it out, but the captain had not a clear business head. Figures puzzled him. He had not application except for what particularly interested him. He screwed down his attention to the completion of an ingenious toy, but could never induce his mind to fix itself on the financial condition of his estate. Consequently Mr. Physic had had an uncontrolled management of the revenues of the Curgenven property.

Now the captain was dead, and the agent did not know who would succeed him. If the property came to a man of business habits and of a practical bent, then it was possible that Mr. Physic's management would be brought to an abrupt termination. It was even possible that he might be called to task for certain matters connected with the management. And the danger menacing him was that mistrust of his judgment and straightforwardness might spread. It may be said that it was almost certain to spread from one squire who employed him to another, and the agency of more properties than Curgenven might be taken from him.

Mr. Physic screwed his brows together into one great knot over the root of his nose, and pursed up his lips as though endeavouring to adapt them to the utterance of a whistle.

The evening was beautiful, and the soft twilight hung over the hills like a delicate blush. But Mr. Physic had no eye for beauty, he did not even turn his eyes on the ridges that caught the glow, but they did fasten with interest on a figure walking along the road before him. He touched the cob with his whip, and shook the rein. The beast quickened its pace, and when the solicitor had reached the pedestrian, he drew up and said, 'Madam, may I offer you a lift? You are too late for the coach; she has passed the turn already, and there is not another till five minutes to this moment to-morrow evening.

She leaves Liskeard at 8 A.M. in an opposite direction. I presume it is to Liskeard you want to go?'

'I am really too late?'

'Really—by five minutes. You must absolutely take my offer, or walk four miles in the dark. I won't say that our roads are infested with banditti, for, thank the powers, we are not in Italy or Spain, or Sicily or Greece, but four miles at night are—well—nine miles too many.'

The person addressed stood still and considered what was to be done.

'I thank you. I accept your kind offer.'

Mr. Physic extended his hand to assist the lady to mount. He studied her face with the advantage he had of being on a higher level, when she was engaged in planting her foot on the step and drawing her skirt to her from contact with the wheel.

The face was striking. It was handsome, the skin olive, delicate, and soft. The hair was so dark, that in the twilight it looked black. Probably, when the sun was on it, some colour might be found in it to redeem it from being really sable. The lady's age was undefinable. She was not a girl, but was in that debatable period which intervenes between youth and age, in which there is still roundness of feature, smoothness of skin; in which there is something superadded to the loveliness of girlhood, the lines and angles that give

character to a face, a something different in kind from the simplicity of youth, a something that is also beautiful, and beautiful in a higher degree. In the girl is possibility, in the woman performance.

Suddenly, as the lady reached the seat, she turned and caught his inquiring or inquisitive eyes, and flashed them down. Physic hastily lashed the cob and drove on.

Then a slight pause ensued. Neither knew what to say. She, of course, desired to know who had offered her a seat by him, but could not ask the question. He was beating about in his mind how to extract from her the information he was resolved to obtain. Presently he turned his eyes furtively towards her, and said—

'I have the honour to address Mrs. Curgenven.'

'Yes, I am Mrs. Curgenven.'

'But not Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven?' he sniggered, as he thought how the lady who arrogated to herself that title had put him down, and how that now he had the opportunity of turning the tables on her.

The lady at his side made no reply. He continued: 'I have just come from Curgenven. I am the agent for the estate. I am the solicitor whom Captain Curgenven has always employed, and *who has been in his confidence.*' He laid great stress on the last words. Then, after a pause, he added,

'in all matters'—these words in what was intended as an aside.

She took no apparent notice of what he said. After another pause he went on: 'I have just come from Curgenven, as I told you. There is a queer kettle of fish stewing there.'

She still maintained her reserve and said nothing.

'A queer kettle. A particularly queer kettle, thanks to your appearing.'

'No thanks to me,' said the lady shortly.

''Pon my word, that's good! Oh, dear, no!—no thanks from any one. But you had a right there, and showed that you would maintain it.'

Again he was met with silence. He pressed his lips together and spitefully lashed the cob, then drew the rein. He did not desire to arrive at Liskeard before the ice was broken between them, and some confidence had been established.

To beat about was profitless, he rushed headforemost at the matter now.

'I know all about it—that marriage at Naples and that other affair at Malta.'

'What other affair?'

'Oh! I know.'

'I beg you will be explicit.'

'Whist! you made a clean bolt of it.'

'I left Malta. I was obliged to.'

'Oh—yes, *obliged*.'

She turned sharply round on him. 'Yes—obliged. What do you mean by that sneer?'

'Did I sneer? Oh, dear, I know nothing but what I have been told, you know. I have heard only the captain's story.'

'And what is his story?'

The agent chuckled to himself. He had unlocked her lips by attacking her.

'You may not like it. Tell me yours.'

'Not yet, I must know what he has said about me.'

Mr. Physic shook his head.

'You would perhaps kick out and swear; and you know the captain is dead?'

'Dead!'

She put her hand on the rein and arrested the horse.

'Not dead?'

'Yes—he has shot himself.'

The horse was at a stand. He could hear her pant for breath; he could feel, almost hear, the bounding of her pulses at his side.

'What else could he do,' asked the agent, 'when the first wife turned up whom he had supposed dead?'

'Let me get out! I cannot breathe! I must be alone!'

She put her left hand to the rail, and stretched her right hand to the splash-board to raise herself, but sank back on her seat again.

'You cannot get out. Nonsense, I will not allow it,' said the solicitor. 'You are not in a fit condition to be left alone.' He whipped the cob, and the gig was again rolling along.

Mr. Physic respected the agitation that had been produced by the startling announcement, and said nothing for full ten minutes. Then all at once the lady at his side drew a deep breath and said, 'I suppose so—he could do naught else. Sooner or later it must have been so.'

'He put himself in the wrong box altogether. Unless he had been sure—unless he had positive proof of your death, he ought not to have married.'

She was breathing heavily and painfully.

'If he couldn't get that, he should have sued for—but never mind that. Why, if you were to turn up, did you not turn up before?'

'I have made mistakes.' She spoke in a subdued tone; her chin was resting on her bosom, and she was looking steadily, but with a dazed eye, before her at the trotting horse.

'A good many,' said Physic.

She said nothing to this, but continued to look broodingly before her.

They were approaching the town, and the agent had not learned much; he became impatient.

'Now look here,' said he. 'Why have you remained latent, so to speak, for nineteen years, and have only now turned up?'

'I—we did not agree. We neither loved nor cared for each other. We were best apart.'

'Where have you been?'

'On the stage—on concert boards—everywhere.'

'And why do you turn up now?'

'I am weary of it. Weary, weary—sick to death.'

'And so you came to Curgenven for a home?'

'I came that some settlement might be arrived at.'

'Rather late in the day.'

'Till I began to inquire, I did not know where Lambert was. I did not know that he had come into a fortune. When we married he was poor, and had no prospects save in his profession, and they were not worth much.'

'Yes; he left the navy without having wrecked a vessel or provoked a mutiny. We may be thankful for that. The property came to him in the nick of time, when he was under a cloud. He had done some rash and stupid thing—in China, I think—against orders, and there would have been a court-martial had he not resigned. The property was something to resign on.'

'I knew nothing about that. We parted at Malta.'

'Yes, and then you made a clean bolt.'

'I was obliged. I was left without means. Lambert had forwarded nothing.'

'But there was the Marchese.'

She flared up into towering wrath. She turned on him, snatched the reins from his hand, and brought the loop down across his knuckles.

'How dare you insult me! Let me get out! I will not stay!'

She drew the horse up short; it had dashed ahead when it heard the cut of the reins and felt the jerk. She rose and would have left the gig, but Mr. Physic held her arm.

'Don't be foolish. Remember I know only the one side, and you asked me for that.'

'Is that the side? Did Lambert dare? If so, I am glad he is dead. Look here!' she was standing in the gig, and she turned, holding the splash-board with one hand. 'Look here! Had he dared to give his side—his side indeed!—in my hearing I would have shot him myself.'

'*De mortuis*—you know the saying. Sit down and be easy.' The agent assumed a coaxing tone. 'I know nothing but what I've been told, and I've been told, I'll be sworn, a pack of lies.'

She reseated herself angrily.

'Go on,' she said. 'Tell me all; I must hear it. What did he say about the Marchese?'

'No, thank you, not if I know it,' answered Physic, with an attempt to assume a comical air. 'After such a tingling rap over the knuckles I won't risk it. I'll tell you nothing myself till the tingle is gone out of them. So you came here to patch up a truce, and extort a settlement, I understand?'

'When I learned where Lambert was, and that he had inherited a fortune, I resolved to see him once more and demand of him some arrangement by which I might be able to live quietly and without being driven from pillar to post, an arrangement that would save me from being always struggling against difficulties. I did not desire much. I did not know, till I came to Liskeard, that he had married again.'

'Why did you remain lost so long, and allow him to make such a mistake?'

'I have told you. We could not agree. I have—do you know it?—wild blood in me, and that made me restless. I have been about in the States, in Canada. I was for a while in California, and on the boards at Frisco. I came back to England. I might have been married again and again, but I knew I could not. Though we saw nothing of each other, knew no more of each other, we were still bound to each other. Why did he marry?'

'There, I allow, he acted foolishly.'

'He acted wrongly,' said the lady, with vehemence. 'But he is dead, and no more against him. I was to blame. I should have let him know where I was, and what I was doing. I was proud, and nourished my resentment, and I never cared to inquire about him and learn anything about him. I was driven at last to swallow my pride and smother my resentment.'

'How so?'

'I had a long illness. I came to great poverty. My voice failed me, and I was weary, deadly weary, of the wandering life, and the ups and downs—mostly downs—which made up that sort of existence. You see,' she flashed up into vehemence again, 'I have a double nature—one by birth, one by training. Born of a roving stock, bred to the quiet domestic life, for a while blood prevailed, and then culture provoked in me a great hunger for rest, for stability, for security. I came here—and he is dead! What now?'

'Aye! that is just what I am asking. What now?'

They were approaching the country town; a few detached villa residences occupied patches of land beside the road, but they were not many. Liskeard is not a place to which persons with independent means were much attracted. Suddenly, from over the garden railings of one of these, bounced a

flaming globe that flared at the head of the horse, touched it, and sent the cob bounding in mad terror to the further side of the road, and before Mr. Physic was aware and prepared, had run into the hedge and was dashing at it, plunging, rearing to escape the volume of flame that had been tossed in the air and was now flickering in the road. The rein snapped when Physic endeavoured to master the frightened brute, and all control over it was lost.

The cob, regardless of everything save its own safety, ran the wheel of the dogcart up the hedge; the shafts snapped as matches, and the trap was thrown over, together with those in it, with violence, so that the agent and the lady fell in the roadway.

In the moment of falling Physic heard a man's voice say, 'There, Justinian, you've gone and done it!'

CHAPTER V.

NAPLES AND MALTA.

Lambert Curgenven had been a third son, with small prospect of succession to the family estate; so small, that no Jews would lend him money on it.

The eldest son and heir was married and had a child, a boy. But the eldest son was only eldest son to a second son. The head of the family was Justinian Curgenven, an old bachelor, and an old bachelor might marry in a fit of folly, and, after all, leave a child to inherit his acres. But the eldest son of the second son broke his neck in hunting. Soon after that the second son of the squire's brother fell a victim to cholera in India. Then the child died of croup, and finally Justinian, the squire, died of gout, and to no one's greater surprise and satisfaction than that of Lambert, Curgenven fell to his lot. It enabled him to retire from the navy at a moment when his

remaining in it would have been inconvenient. He had been in command of a vessel in the China seas and had disregarded orders. He had landed the blue-jackets and had attacked and taken a fort, contrary to instructions, and a court-martial seemed inevitable. He had escaped it by resignation.

He left the navy and came to take possession of Curgenven. He was an amiable scatter-brain, liked and laughed at by all who knew him.

After a short while he proposed to and married the rector's daughter. Before doing this, however, he consulted Mr. Physic, and the substance of his communication was as follows. It must be premised that Captain Lambert was not able to tell any story, least of all his own, in consecutive form. Times, places, persons, incidents were tumbled out of his memory in confusion; but with some pains Physic was able to reduce them to order.

When he was lieutenant on board H.M.S. the *Catamount*, he was stationed for a while off Naples. The officers had given an entertainment on board, a dance, to those English, Americans, and Neapolitans who had shown them civilities and had invited them to dinner or to picnics on shore. At this dance there had been present an old lady, a Mrs. Fenton, with her adopted daughter, and the girl, aged but sixteen,

was known as Miss Theresa Fenton. She was a handsome, dark-eyed, dark-haired girl, and she did not lack partners that evening. Lieutenant Curgenven took her to supper, and managed to secure three dances with her, whereas no other officer got more than one. In returning by boat from the vessel, Mrs. Fenton took a chill that brought on Neapolitan fever, and within a week she was dead.

The position of the girl, whose name was Theresa, was now a difficult one and eminently uncertain. Her protectress had enjoyed an annuity, and left nothing to Theresa, having had nothing to leave. The relatives of this lady in England had never regarded the girl with a favourable eye. They said that Mrs. Fenton had picked her out of the gutter, and to the gutter she was welcome to return. They informed Theresa that there was nothing for her, and she must shift for herself. A suit of mourning they would graciously allow her, if it did not exceed a stipulated sum, and they reluctantly consented to pay her bill at the hotel-pension to the end of the month, *i. e.* for three weeks after the death of Mrs. Fenton. They further intimated to her that it would be advisable if, for the future, she discontinued calling herself Miss Fenton, and were to employ the name which properly belonged to her, which they believed was Warren.

This conduct of the relatives of the deceased lady was much

commented on by those who were *en pension* at the hotel, as well as by such English as had made the acquaintance of Mrs. Fenton and her adopted daughter. They professed to feel very strongly on the subject; but though there was depth in their feeling on the cruelty of leaving a young girl unprovided for, it did not reach the depths of their pockets.

It was agreed on all sides that the Fenton family had behaved abominably, and they could not have ventured to behave in such a mean manner had the event taken place in England, under the observation of a censorious neighbourhood.

But, precisely for the same reason, those visitors who were in Naples endeavoured to emancipate themselves from responsibility in the girl. They were but visitors, birds of passage, and had taken only a passing interest in the orphan. Something, however, had to be done, and done at the least possible cost to themselves. As the Fenton family declined to be saddled with her, she must be saddled on some one else.

Lieutenant Curgenven was both amiable and soft, and, in addition, was much struck with Theresa's charms. The entire English and American community resolved that he must marry her.

He himself was half willing, and was cajoled, and flattered into declaring himself ready to be her champion. The entire English and American community breathed long respirations

of relief when Lambert Curgenven married the girl; it was no concern of theirs that he had not in the least considered how he was to maintain her after they were married.

The Anglo-American community at Naples provided the wedding-breakfast, but then it also helped to consume it, and the community thanked its good luck that it had come off so cheap. The breakfast cost each subscriber fifteen liras, wine included. When next the subscribers attended the Embassy chapel, and heard about laying up store in heaven, they smirked with satisfaction at the knowledge that they had each fifteen liras laid up in the unassailable treasury above.

Moreover, all the subscribers to the wedding-breakfast took out the change over and above what they had consumed in comment on the conduct of those persons who had left Naples precipitately for Rome, it was believed to escape the subscription-list that was being talked of in aid of the destitute young lady.

After the marriage, a month passed happily enough, and then Lambert Curgenven awoke to the fact that he was obliged to maintain his wife, and that his lieutenant's pay was insufficient for the purpose. He had a little money of his own, very little, and having been a thriftless young fellow, putting his hand into his pocket when he ought to have kept it out, the small sum he had was expended, and he must wait

till his new quarterage came before he could pay his wife's *pension* in the hotel. He then insisted on her moving to lodgings, which would be less expensive. She consented, but in the lodgings ready-money was required, and ready-money Lambert Curgenven had not got. A certain Neapolitan Marchese offered to relieve him of immediate embarrassment by a loan, and Lieutenant Curgenven at once accepted the offer, though he knew that this Marchese Gioberti had been a great admirer of Theresa, and had paid her assiduous court.

Then ensued scenes of mutual recrimination. Lambert was chafed because he could not repay his loan, annoyed because Gioberti called at the lodgings that had been taken for Theresa, was inclined to quarrel with the Marchese, but could not afford to do so owing to his debt, and consequently vented his ill-humour on his wife, wanting her to forbid the Marchese the house, when he ought to have done so himself.

Theresa, young and inexperienced, was offended at her husband's jealousy, resented his humours, and complained at the straits to which she was reduced for lack of necessaries. She could not understand her husband's pecuniary embarrassment, and made no allowance for his harassed temper. She had not had her heart touched by him, and his affection for her had been of a very flimsy and ephemeral quality.

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Then the *Catamount* was ordered to Malta, and Lambert ordered his wife thither also, and was mightily relieved in mind that the Marchese was left behind. He solemnly promised to repay the loan within a twelvemonth, but at the same time felt a qualm in his conscience, for, if he did repay the sum, there would be nothing left for the maintenance of Theresa.

The marriage had been announced by him to his uncle the squire, Justinian Curgenven, and Justinian had acknowledged the tidings in churlish fashion. He had told Lambert he was a fool to marry a girl without a penny, and assured him that if he looked to him for assistance, should a family arrive, or any other embarrassments arise consequent on this step, he would look in vain. He had a pack of otter hounds, and otter hounds cost him all his loose cash, and gave him pleasure, whereas a pack of grand-nephews and nieces would and could afford him nothing save annoyance.

On reaching Malta all went smoothly for a while, till at the hotel where Theresa was the landlord became importunate for payment. With his usual carelessness Lambert on arriving in Malta had cast his troubles behind him, and had not given a thought to the future. His good-humour had returned, and Theresa found him an agreeable companion when he came on shore. But no sooner did the straitness of his means begin

again to vex him, than he became peevish and uncertain in his mood, ready to take umbrage at trifles, to charge his wife with extravagance if she bought a pin, and to allow himself to order a hamper of champagne when out for a jaunt with friends to Gozo. When the beauty and youth of his wife made her the queen of a swarm of admiring officers, Lambert Curgenven became jealous, and yet he allowed himself to flirt with whatever pretty girl there was in Malta. Matters were soon across again between the pair, and when all at once the Marchese Gioberti appeared in the island, the jealousy of Lambert blazed forth, and a violent scene ensued between husband and wife. He ordered her immediately to go to England. She demanded the money which would enable her to return, and some arrangements to be made for her maintenance in England. As Lieutenant Curgenven could not furnish the money, and had not thought of where and how she was to live in England, he stormed to cover his retreat. After this they hardly met without a fresh quarrel.

The unsatisfactory condition of affairs was not a secret. The captain in command of the *Catamount* saw that before long Lieutenant Curgenven's pecuniary difficulties would cause a scandal, and a hint to the admiral in command of the Mediterranean fleet sufficed to obtain Lambert's recall to England, and appointment to the *Wagtail*, on the Pacific station.

Then all communication between Lieutenant Curgenven and his wife came to an end. He did not send her any money, because he had none to send, and he did not write, because he could not enclose a cheque in his letter. When he did hear from Malta, it was that Theresa had disappeared, and as the Marchese Gioberti had left at or about the same time, it was concluded that they had departed together.

This was quite sufficient for Lambert Curgenven to make him declare that he washed his hands of the whole business, and feel that he need no longer concern himself about his wife or his debt. He need not remit money to the woman who had been false to him, and he need not concern himself with an obligation to a man who had defrauded him of his wife. Lieutenant Curgenven had an easy conscience, and he readily convinced himself that matters stood as it best suited his purse that they should stand.

He spent some months in the China seas, and obtained a commandership, and finally blundered into committing a gallant act which he was not authorized to commit, and which was done in contravention of orders. Then he retired, and, as already stated, retired to the position of a country squire. He had been unlucky through the early part of his career, he hoped that now luck had turned, and was favouring him.

When he had settled himself into Curgenven, he found it dull to be solitary, and, as he said, Scripture assured him it was not good for a man to be alone, so he proposed to Miss Pamphlet, a handsome, taking girl, the daughter of the rector of his parish, and was of course accepted.

Then, when he had been accepted, he began to consider whether there was any impediment in the way to marriage, and he thought that possibly that matter of his previous union with Theresa Fenton in marriage ought to have been formally dissolved by the Divorce Court, or informally by the act of Providence in removing that lady. He spoke of the matter in a rambling, casual manner to Mr. Physic, and asked his opinion.

The solicitor's opinion was that some very decided evidence of the death of Theresa should be obtained, and if that was not available, then such evidence should be collected as would justify an action in the Divorce Court. To this latter Captain Curgenven objected that it was no use ripping up old sores, and, further, that it would be expensive.

Moreover, argued Lambert Curgenven, he did not know whether Mr. Pamphlet might not interpose and forbid the marriage if any ugly stories were about and discussed, especially if they got into the papers, as divorce cases always do, and for his part, he was inclined to take for granted that

Theresa was dead. He did write to Malta, and he empowered Physic to spend a hundred pounds in inquiries, but he was not prepared to throw away more. He professed himself to be morally certain that Theresa was dead. 'If she were not dead,' he argued, 'she would have rounded on him for money long ere this, especially when she learned that he had come in for a property. But not a word of her, or from her, had reached him since she left Malta along with that confounded Marchese.' That she had departed with the Marchese was a fixed idea in the head of Captain Curgenven. When he spoke to Physic of the disappearance of his wife, he spoke of it in association with the Marchese as a certain fact, without telling him that he had no further grounds for such an assertion than Maltese gossip.

Physic instituted inquiries in Italy, and ascertained that Gioberti was dead. He had died three years before, and no one in the family, as far as Physic could discover, knew, or would admit they knew, anything about Theresa. Gioberti, though a marquis, was without landed estates, and lived a rambling coffee-house life; he was said to have gone to Naples, and then to Malta, because he had delicate lungs and rheumatism.

Mr. Physic, after having spent forty pounds on researches, and paid himself sixty for instituting the researches, was

obliged to admit to Captain Curgenven that his inquiries had produced absolutely no results. Theresa had not been traced. Presumably she was dead; but not a scrap of evidence of either her death or her infidelity had been discovered. 'Very well, then,' said Captain Lambert, 'you shut your mouth like a sensible man and say nothing. We will chance it. I am as morally certain that she is dead, as I am that I am a good fellow.'

It must be allowed that when Captain Curgenven told his story, or rather tumbled out the contents of his memory-basket before Physic, he did not lay all the blame on Theresa, but allowed that there had been fault on his side. 'But, bless me!' said he, 'what can you expect of a man when he is at his wits' ends for money? He can't be in a good humour, can he, Physic? I put it to you.'

Although he did admit that he had been to blame, he let the agent clearly understand that his blameworthiness was excusable, forced on him by circumstances; whereas the fault in Theresa was quite inexcusable, and was due to natural perversity or depravity—call it what you will. 'Then again, Physic, those people at Naples took a tremendous interest in us, and had made up their minds that we should marry. I was a young chap and easily persuaded. So I could not do otherwise. I put it to you. You are a man who knows the world.'

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE PILL-BOX.

'THERE, Justinian! now you've gone and done it!'

Mr. Percival Curgenven strode through his garden, there was not space in it for him to get up a run, and, leaning his elbows on the breasting of stone in which were fixed the rails that cut him off from the road, he looked between the bars, and said, 'By George, Justinian! you've gone and killed one or two! It's a case of manslaughter against you, and penal servitude.'

Looking a little more attentively in the dusk he distinguished the figures in the road—Physic struggling to his feet, the lady motionless. Then he exclaimed, 'By George, my boy! it's a bad job—confound your fire-ballooning!' He threw open the gate and ran out to lend assistance.

The cob had dashed along the highway with the broken shafts and the rein dangling from him. The dog-cart lay a

mass of chips on one side. Mr. Percival Curgenven did not give it a thought.

'I'll bring an action against you,' cried Physic, reaching his feet. 'What infernal pranks— Oh! I beg pardon a thousand times. Mr. Percival, you don't mean to say it is you?'

'That boy of mine has been letting off a fire-balloon,' said Mr. Curgenven, 'but never mind that. Is the lady hurt?'

'Hurt—of course she's hurt. How could it be otherwise? It's a miracle I'm not killed. Fetch a light, and let's see what is the matter with her.'

'Here's the remains of this darned fire-balloon flickering in the hedge,' said Mr. Percival Curgenven, wrapping his silk handkerchief round his fingers and laying hold of a wire connected with a flaming sponge saturated in spirits of wine, and which was all that remained of the ill-fated fire-balloon.

Mr. Percival Curgenven brought this over to where the lady lay unconscious in the road.

'I hope her neck is not broken,' said this gentleman, 'partly for your sake, Justin, and partly for hers.'

Mr. Percival Curgenven knelt by the prostrate woman and passed the flaming tow to and fro above her face. The eyes were closed, but not shut, and the light was reflected through the eyelashes.

'Why—who the deuce!—she's very like—but here, Justin, lend a hand, and, Physic, you also, if not broken to bits. We must not leave her in the road, but carry her into the Pill-box.'

The Pill-box was Mr. P. Curgenven's residence in the suburbs of Liskeard. It was a small—a ridiculously small villa. The former occupier of this house had been pleased to call it 'The Court,' and to have his letters addressed to him as a resident at 'The Court, Liskeard.'

When he departed, owing to the inability of the bankers to honour his cheques, Mr. Percival Curgenven had taken the house.

Said he, in his dry fashion, 'I don't see why a house any more than a beast should take its title from its least noble part. The rattlesnake and the wagtail are exceptions in the realm of animals. The back-yard, that measures twelve feet by ten, is the only court this house can speak of, and we had better say nothing about it. So I shall call it the "Pill-box"; then every one will understand that it is small, and that its owner has had something to do with medicine. I don't see the fun in lodges that lead to nothing, in granges that have not even a barn or outhouse attached to them, and in halls where there is hardly room to turn round in the passage.'

Mr. Percival Curgenven was a cousin of Mr. Lambert, and

possessed some of the family fatality of making a muddle of life. He had been educated as a surgeon, and had walked the hospitals and bought a practice. Then, finding the practice he had purchased had been spoiled by the man from whom he bought it, by devotion to the bottle, he had been disgusted, had lacked the patience and resolution to work it up again, had thrown it up, had tried art, failed in that, and then had rushed away to the Californian gold-fields, where he had indeed found some nuggets, and raked together some gold-dust, but he had allowed himself to be robbed of his nuggets, and had let the gold-dust run away between his fingers till nothing remained but fingers.

Then he returned to England in worse predicament than when he went out; for he went out a single man, he returned a widower with a son. Consequently he had to feed two mouths and clothe two backs instead of one.

Happily for him, his return to England coincided with the accession of his cousin Lambert to Curgenven. The cousins had been friends and play-fellows as boys, and Lambert was determined to secure the presence in his neighbourhood of a man of his own kidney, who had knocked about the world, and was not starched and heavy like the country squires of the district, men who had hardly left their paternal acres, and cared for little beyond board and bench business. In the

exuberance of his pleasure at seeing his cousin again, he undertook to provide him with an income of a hundred and fifty pounds per annum during his own life, on the sole condition that Percival should live within nine miles of him. Lambert had kept his word; he had not been very punctual in his quarterly payments, because he lacked the faculty of punctuality. If a month elapsed after quarter-day and no cheque had been received, Percival wrote and reminded him that he had been forgotten, and in most cases Lambert expressed his penitence at the oversight by adding a five or ten pounds to the sum due. On one occasion, with his customary carelessness, he sent the cheque twice over, and when Percival returned the second, Lambert refused to receive it back. He had made a mistake, he said, and must abide by the consequences. The only way in which he could teach himself business habits, he said, was by making himself suffer for his errors. On a hundred and fifty pounds, Mr. Percival was able to make both ends meet. He had not expensive tastes, and his boy's education made no great hole in the hundred and fifty pounds, for his boy was given next to none. On the evening on which our story opens, this son, Justinian, was engaged on letting off a fire-balloon just as the dog-cart approached. He had summoned his father from the smoking-room to witness the exhibition. The balloon had been caught by the wind and swept over the

garden-wall, into the highway, just as the dog-cart came up. The wind had turned the globe over, the silver paper had ignited, and the whole flaming mass had been carried against the head of Mr. Physic's cob. It was enough to have frightened a beast with cart-horse nerve; it would have sent a shiver down the back of even an earth-worm.

The unconscious woman was taken into the house, and laid on the sofa in the diminutive parlour.

Mr. Percival with promptitude and skill examined her, and then said, turning his head to Physic, who had thrown himself into an easy-chair to recover the effects of his fall and shaking, 'The collar-bone is broken, and there is a slight congestion of the brain.'

'Indeed!' said the agent, who was groping about his own limbs to discover if he were sound in every member. 'I suppose I'm all right—but I don't know.'

'Oh, you are not hurt. Where does she live? She must be taken home.'

'Live! Lord, how am I to know?'

'Who is she?'

Mr. Physic remained silent. To tell who she was would entail too long a story. He was not sure whether Mr. Percival had been taken into confidence by the squire relative to the first marriage.

'You know, Physic, I can't lodge her in the Pill-box. For one thing there isn't room; for another, 'twouldn't be proper. Where does she hang out?'

'I'm blessed if I know.'

'And you don't know who she is? That's awkward.'

'I picked her up on the road. She was walking from Curgenven. I gave her a lift.'

'And that is all you know about her? By George! this is awkward. How can she be accommodated in the Pill-box? I'd do anything right and kind to a poor devil—a she-one no less than a he—but I can't, I haven't the space in which to be kind. There ain't a spare bedroom in the box. I can't turn Justin out, and send him to sleep in the pig-sty, for there isn't a pig-sty to the place. I can't go out myself and let her have my room—not very easily; and as for that old beldame Bathsheba, she'd make such a to-do if I proposed that the poor creature should have her room and that she should go elsewhere, that I wouldn't risk it. It's a confounded nuisance. We must find out something about her, and where she lives. You don't even know her name?'

Physic hesitated; then said, 'It wouldn't do, would it, to ask a lady who and what she was when you offered her a lift?'

'Is she a lady? Well, I suppose so. I've seen her somewhere before, but, bless me—I don't know when.'

He took the lamp in his hand and went over to the prostrate woman on the couch, and let the light fall on her face.

At this moment she opened her eyes.

'Bless me!' exclaimed Percival, 'it's La Lamberta! Signora, do you remember me?'

The lady, still dazed, and without the light of intelligence in her large dark eyes, dropped her feet from the sofa and sat upright. She tried to move her arm, and failed. This seemed to puzzle her.

'No, my dear,' said Mr. Percival, 'very sorry, but you cannot use that hand. I must strap you up; you have got broken bones, and must be put in such a condition that they shall splice themselves. You will have to keep that arm screwed to your bosom for some time to come. You've had a bad spill, Signorina, and the road was hard. But you are in good hands, I won't forget old times. Bless me! don't you remember me at Frisco, eh?'

The large dark eyes of the lady rested on the speaker with some inquiry in them, but not much. She was not sufficiently recovered from the jar of the fall to have her senses at command.

She, however, made no opposition to being treated by the skilful hands of Mr. Percival.

'Now look here, Physic, and you too, Justin. There is no surgery in this little house. There wouldn't be room for one if I wanted it. One passage, one sitting-room, one dining-room, that serves also as smoking-room, as we give no dinner-parties. That's all the accommodation we have on the first floor. So, as I have to attend to this lady, you make yourselves scarce. You, Physic, can pick up the chips of your dog-cart, they are worth saving, they will make excellent kindling for the fires at home, and Justinian shall run into the town and find out what has become of the horse. I shan't be long.'

'Why do you call her La Lamberta?' asked Physic inquisitively as he stood in the doorway.

'Because I knew her at Frisco as La Lamberta. Is not that good reason? Come, I'm not going to answer questions now, I must attend to my patient. Look sharp, or all the chips will be carried off to light other fires than your own.'

When the room was clear of the agent and Justin, Mr. Percival Curgenven bound the lady's arm and strapped it to her so that she could not move it.

'Now tell me, where are you staying?'

'At the milliner's, Miss Treise's.'

'Then, as soon as you can walk, I will escort you thither. If you cannot walk, I will run for a cab.'

She stood up, took a step or two forward, turned giddy, and was caught and led back to the sofa.

'No—you cannot manage it. What is more, you must remain here for an hour or so till you have recovered the fall that has shaken you. Sit down, I will give you tea—I'll make it directly. Do you remember me?'

The dreamy eyes of the lady rested again upon him. Her lips parted, but she did not speak.

'Well,' said Mr. Percival, 'you see my memory is better than yours; or, perhaps, I may flatter myself with thinking that the spill has confused you, so that you do not remember me just at this present moment.'

Mr. Percival Curgenven rang the bell. An old woman with a grim face answered it.

'Bathsheba,' said he, 'tea, at once. This lady is faint and ill—thrown out of a carriage.'

The servant retired, muttering to herself.

'That's her way,' said Mr. Curgenven. 'She's a good old soul, nursed me when a baby, and takes advantage of this now to be crusty and rude. But she means no harm, she loves me as my soul, and Justinian a thousand times better than me. Do you recollect the little Justinian? What, not at Frisco? We were in the same little hotel. Down on my luck there, the poor wife ill, and how good and kind you were to her! Now

do you recollect? You were La Lamberta then—what are you now?'

Her eyes were intently fixed on him; she was making an effort to collect her scattered senses and recall the past.

'Do you not remember?' he continued; 'you took my dear wife's place in the theatre at San Francisco when she was ill. You were staying in the same hotel with us. You laughed when you heard what was the name of my boy. I don't believe my wife ever properly recovered his birth, though he was born two years before her last illness. But she battled on, brave soul that she was, she would not give in, and I—I was an ass, and earned nothing. You were so kind when she was sick and worried and weak because unable to fulfil her engagement. Poor dear! she was always hoping she would pull through—she hoped to the end of the chapter. Do you remember you said Justinian was too much of a name for such a little chap as my boy? I said it was a family name, and that was true. We called you Signora, or Signorina Lamberta, but of course I knew you were no Italian. You were posted all over the town as La Lamberta. Now, surely, you remember! What are you now? I mean, what is your real, not your professional name. Not La Lamberta at Liskeard, I take it.'

Then she said, 'I am Mrs. Curgenven.'

Mr. Percival stared, drew back a step, and studied her with astonishment. He supposed that his patient had gone off her head.

Then suddenly she clasped her hand—the only one she could use—over her eyes, burst into tears, and sobbed, 'I am very miserable. After nineteen years I see my husband—and he shoots himself.'

'My dear Signora,' said Mr. Percival, 'here comes the tea. You are gone clean crazed. Take that, and I will compound something that shall compose your nerves. Mrs. Curgenven—Mrs. Fiddlesticks!'

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE MILLINER'S.

A FEW days later, Theresa was seated in a little parlour above the dressmaker's shop in Liskeard, where were her lodgings.

This parlour of Miss Treise's was small, but the pattern on the wall-paper was large and pretentious, one of those self-assertive papers that cannot be kept in the background and obscured by any amount of furniture and of decoration in a room. There is effrontery in designs on paper and cretonne, as there is in certain human faces. Two large body-coloured pictures, one of Vesuvius quiescent, the other of Vesuvius in eruption, were hung upon the walls. Neapolitan skies and Mediterranean seas were exaggerated in blueness on the first, and the artist had done his utmost with vermilion and lemon-yellow to produce an effect of fire in the second; but these pictures were modest and harmonious in tone compared with

the wall-paper, which seemed to jostle frames and pictures in insolent self-assertion.

On a sideboard, under a glass bell that was cracked, stood a stuffed gull, mangy with moth. The brown, empty cocoons out of which the insects had hatched hung in the down, and the moths themselves strewed the sanded base. After having been hatched out they had found themselves imprisoned under the bell glass, and had perished there. Three papier-maché heads of ladies, with very staring blue eyes, pink cheeks, and black hair, stood also on the chiffonier. They were blocks on which Miss Treise tried bonnets, and submitted them to the approval of customers. In one corner of the apartment was a wickerwork structure, something like that which we are informed was employed by the Druids for enclosing human victims to be burnt as sacrifices. This structure was, however, not intended for any other purpose than the shaping and showing off of gowns, mantillas, &c. One whole corner of the room was blocked off by a cheval glass, in which ladies might admire themselves when costumed in the preparations of Miss Treise's genius and dexterous hands.

There was, happily, no round table in the middle of the apartment, so that it was practicable to move about in it.

The little upper parlour of Miss Treise's was in fact her

show-room, and the room in which ladies were measured for their garments, and were fitted, on fixed dates subsequent to the measuring.

When Miss Treise let her spare bedroom, she allowed Theresa the use of this parlour when not wanted; specifying that whenever a customer appeared, the lodger was to disappear into her bedroom at the back, and not emerge from it again to re-occupy the show-room till the customer had departed.

In this room, and in the window, sat Theresa. Her left arm was bound across her bosom, the hand on a level with the right shoulder. Her face was much paler than when she had appeared on the terrace of Curgenven. It then bore the impress of care, but now this expression was deepened. Pain of body, distress of mind through grief over what had occurred, and doubt as to the future, had conspired to make her look wan and ill. There were traces of tears on her long dark lashes, and the eyes were sunken. Her fine lips quivered as she spoke. Theresa was a woman of strength and determination, but she was now shaken in mind as in body, and was unnerved. With youth she had possessed confidence. She had looked into the future without alarm, without asking what it had in store for her, with that faith, that confidence in destiny, that is given to youth, and this had imparted buoyancy to her spirits and brightness to her manner. But youth was

past. Fortune had failed her. Fate had played her cruel tricks. Health had declined, and now, at the moment when she thought that she had reached a point at which uncertainty might cease, by the suicide of Captain Curgenven all had become as doubtful as before.

She had not been to the funeral that day. She could not have gone had she purposed, for she felt that she was hardly recovered sufficiently from her fall to bear the motion of a vehicle, and, what was more, had not the money wherewith to defray the hire of one. She had seen in the little local paper a notice of the inquest, and had learned from it that the jury had unanimously found that the death was accidental. How could it be otherwise, when the squire had met with no pecuniary losses, when he was more than usually cheerful, and intent on amusing the Sunday-school children with his mechanical contrivances; when he was blessed with the happiest family concord? There were absolutely no grounds on which the jury could suspect that the death was not accidental, and so accordingly they adjudged it. The fact of Captain Curgenven being son-in-law to the Reverend James Pamphlet was in itself a guarantee that everything about him, his death included, was correct, was respectable.

'Now, ma'am,' said Miss Treise, in a tone sharp and high-pitched, the reverse of that in which she addressed her

customers, on whom she cooed like a dove, 'Now, ma'am, I'm exceeding sorry, but I can't help it. I'm particularly sorry because of your accident, and I wouldn't for the world seem cruel and unfeeling, and all that sort of thing; but I'm a lone unmarried lady, and lives by the work of my hands, and can't afford it. If you'll be good enough to pay me something, I'll try and be content. I can't be expected, you know—me, an unmarried lady—to maintain you as well as myself.'

'I am distressed,' said Theresa, in a dead, dispirited tone. 'I had a very small sum remaining, and I expected that it would last till—till I had obtained what I came here for. I have been disappointed——'

'Yes, ma'am, I understand,' said Miss Treise shortly; 'came begging and was refused, and I am to suffer. I thought, when you looked at my rooms, as you was a real lady, and not one of your so-to-speak sharpers.'

'I beg your pardon, I have been disappointed where I had every confidence of success. I had in this neighbourhood some one related to me by marriage, and I thought he would have provided for my future. He is dead. I have no hope left.'

'And I am to suffer! It ain't in reason—it ain't fair. Give me a reference. Say who it was. Tell me some one to whom

I can apply for certainty that I shall be paid in the end, and I'll put up with this a little longer.'

'I can give you no name.'

'I don't believe a word of your story, then,' said Miss Treise. 'It's all a make-up; and if I hadn't Mr. Curgenven's assurance, I should say the broken collar-bone was fudge also!'

'Then you will turn me out! Well——'

'I only ask for some satisfaction that I shan't be cheated,' said Miss Treise. 'Thinking as you was a lady born and bred, I let my rooms, and very beautiful rooms they be; and I've taken in double portions of meat and loaves, and milk and butter, and what not. There was a pot of marmalade—thinking you was a real lady—cost tenpence, we get at co-operative store price for ready-money, and I paid tenpence for that there marmalade, real Dundee, I did. You don't suppose as I indulge myself in Dundee marmalade, do you? But as I thought you was a real lady, and had money, I ordered it and put it on the table at breakfast, and had two cup puddings made out of it. I'm a lone unmarried lady, and obliged to support myself. I'm now in black for my mother, my aged parent, as was a cruel sufferer for many years, and the doctor's bill was twenty-five pounds, and the funeral cost twelve pounds ten-and-eightpence. You don't suppose I can pay thirty-seven pounds ten-and-eightpence and have Dundee marmalade, do you?'

'I really am sorry.'

'Sorrow won't pay me,' pursued Miss Treise, who had worked herself up into acutest asperity; 'and there were soles I had of the fish-cart, only Friday last, one-and-eight, thinking as you was a real lady. If I hadn't, I'd have bought flounders, dabs; but being as I supposed a proper lady, I had soles. When am I to see my money again?'

'I did hope,' said Theresa, 'that if I were disappointed, I might have worked out what I owed with my fingers. I am natty and clever with them. But——'

'Oh, yes; but now you can't because of the collar-bone; and you suppose I'll keep you on till you're well, for the sake of what you can do then? And who's to pay Mr. Curgenven?'

'I do not think he will bring in a bill. I nursed his wife once in San Francisco when she was very ill.'

'Oh!' said Miss Treise, and the roughness went out of her voice. 'Oh, you know something of Mr. Curgenven, do you, ma'am? You think he'll see that I'm not left unpaid?'

'Indeed, indeed!' said Theresa, flushing, 'I entreat you say nothing about this to him. No; he is not responsible in any way for my debts. Here—take this gold watch and chain. Take it off my neck; I cannot well myself, because of my disabled arm. And here, on my left hand, is the guard-ring; it has a ruby in it and is worth something.

Take that also, and raise what you can on the watch and chain and ring; they were given me by my husband when we married.'

'Your husband! Is he dead?'

'Yes; dead!'

'Been dead long?'

'He is dead. Take these articles. Here, pull this ring off; my hand is tied up and the fingers swollen with the straps. You must pass a thread under it, and then wind the thread round the finger beyond the ring. That will compress the swelling and the ring will come off. What these articles will bring in will pay you and leave something over till I am better able to go, and then—I will go away.'

She looked dreamily out of the window. The thought came up in her mind, whither should she go?

'Well, ma'am,' said Miss Treise, in a subdued voice, 'I really wouldn't if I could help it. I always said you was a real lady, and now I'm sure of it. We'll see what we can do with the watch and the ring. Mr. Jope, the goldsmith, is a friend of mine, a sort of cousin through my mother, and I know you can trust him to do right by you, and give you what these gee-gaws are really worth.'

She put her hand to her bosom—the milliner's pincushion—and drew thence a threaded needle, which she passed under the

ring on the stiff finger of Theresa's left hand, and began to wind the cotton about the finger.

Theresa thought, with a bitter sense in her heart, that she was parting with the only things remaining to her of her deceased husband's gifts, on the very day on which he was committed to the earth. She had never loved him—never really cared for him. His conduct during the brief period in which they had been together had not been calculated to inspire love, even regard. She had been a mere child when she took him, and she took him in the moment of helplessness, when she had no one else to look to for support; but hardly had she been united to him, before she found that he was the most unstable of men, a creature of caprice, who had made no preparation for her future, and who dropped her the moment his opportunity for so doing came. She had not loved him—she had not cared for him; but now that he was dead she thought of him with exceeding pity, and with regret that she should have been unwittingly the means of shortening his days. No doubt he had been guilty of a grave fault, and when this was brought home to him by her reappearance, he did not know how otherwise to escape the consequences than by putting an end to himself. The fault was his, not hers; yet she had been the means of bringing the punishment down on him.

Whilst Miss Treise was engaged on Theresa's ring, and just

as she had exclaimed, 'Now it is on the move—it is sliding off the finger!' the door opened and Mr. Percival Curgenven came in. He had but just returned from the funeral, and was in his black suit, with hat bound with crape, and had new black kid gloves on his hands.

'Excuse me running up,' said he, 'the girl said Miss Treise was here. I've just seen my poor cousin gathered to his fathers, and, by Jingo—but what are you doing there to the Signora's hand? Miss Treise, you are not meddling with the bandages, I hope?'

'Oh, no, sir!' answered the dressmaker promptly, 'I'm only taking off the ring.'

'Taking off the ring? Does it hurt her?'

'No, sir, but I'm going to take it to Mr. Jope to prize it. You see, sir, I'm a lone unmarried lady, and my afflicted parent—No, ma'am, it's no use your plucking at me and frowning, I will speak the truth. It's just this, Mr. Curgenven. The lady here—I make no doubt she is a real lady—has not been able to pay for her board and lodging, and I can't afford to keep her here for nothing, so we are going to dispose of her ring and watch and chain, that is all, sir. I said if she'd any one she knew, and could refer me to, as would stand to her that I should receive my money, I wouldn't press her no more; but as she couldn't do that, and no one has a right to luxuries, as a

watch and chain and ring, who hasn't paid for her bread-and-butter, let alone the sole and Dundee marmalade, she gave me authority to raise a little money on them trinkets she has.'

A flame started to Theresa's cheeks, and she bowed her head. She was angry and vexed, ashamed that her necessity should be known, angry at the greed of the woman who took advantage of the opportunity to almost force Mr. Curgenven to offer the requisite money.

'Look here, Miss Treise!' said Mr. Percival. 'You cut down-stairs and make out your bill, and bring it me. I am in debt to the Signora—have been for years, and never paid it off. I'll do it now.'

When the dressmaker had disappeared: 'Signora—at low water-mark?'

Theresa bent her head.

'So am I—ebb tide—frightful. Only think—had four thousand a year offered me with one hand, and with the other every penny I have to live on snatched from me. But, by George! Signora, that shan't interfere, I'll help you all I can, and in every way. We have-nots make the best comrades.'

'How have you lost?'

'My own cousin, to whose funeral I have been, had made a will before he married constituting me his heir. Then he

married, and the fact of his marriage nullified the will—and he made, it seems, no fresh one, so I am left out in the cold. He had always given me a small annuity, and by his death I lose that. But I am a man and have my energies. I'll shift somehow. I am concerned for you—I wish I knew how to help you.'

Then into the room was shown Mr. Physic.

'Now, ma'am,' said he, 'what do you say to this? There's a fortune in your hands—four thousand—to give to one or another, and none of it to stick to your fingers unless you bring the matter into court, and see what is to be got there, with my help. What do you say to that?' He looked round, saw Mr. Percival, started, and said—

'There, there, I'm talking nonsense. I don't mean it, I was joking. The fact is, I am a wag.'

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. CURGENVEN, NUMBER TWO.

'How do, ma'am!' said Mr. Physic, entering the boudoir where Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven was engaged at her secretaire of rosewood writing letters.

There was veiled defiance in the tone of voice, and Mrs. Curgenven looked up in surprise, for she was accustomed to deference from every one, the agent included.

'Well!' she said in a hard tone, as she drew about her a moral panoply of steel, 'what is it to-day, Mr. Physic?'

'I have ventured—although it be early days—so soon after the funeral, to drive over, Mrs. Curgenven.'

'Mrs. ——?'

'Mrs. Curgenven,' repeated Physic, with a tone of triumph in his manner and voice; 'not, in matter of fact, of Curgenven, who, however, considers herself as such by right.'

The widow resumed her writing, with a toss of the chin and a short snort.

Mr. Physic waited. He had his hat in his hand, and he worked round the brim with his fingers before he spoke again. The lady continued writing as though unconscious of his presence.

Presently he said, 'I beg pardon, but I think it advisable that the two Mistresses Curgenven should meet and have the matter out between them. We don't want to have a disturbance and a talk, and have an uproar over the matter.'

'Excuse me,' said Mrs. Curgenven, continuing to write, 'I am engaged this morning. Waters ought to have said so. I have letters.'

'I think it would be advisable, ma'am, if you would let the letters wait and not postpone this matter. It must be brought to a head in one way or other, either privately or publicly. Which would you prefer?'

'I presume, from your manner, that you have been enlisted to act for that person. Very well. I shall find some one else to act for me, if necessary, to defend me against impostors and their abettors.'

The agent coloured slightly. There had existed a covert feud between him and the lady ever since the marriage of Captain Lambert. She had used her influence with her husband to get him to either take the management of his

estate into his own hands or to put the accounts before a competent auditor, who would thoroughly investigate them, and satisfy her mind whether Physic was dealing with them honourably and honestly. But the captain was inert and good-natured, with a vein of scepticism in his soul. He argued that probably Physic was no worse than another, and that he himself might fall into less scrupulous or less competent hands if he changed his agent; that if he were defrauded it must be of small sums, and that the payment he made for Physic's services was small; that if he got another agent he might have to pay twice the salary and get worse cheated, so that it was best for him to let things remain as they were.

Physic was well aware that he had had Mrs. Curgenven as his antagonist for the last seventeen years, and he had never been quite certain whether she would not prevail in the end over the squire by persistence and succeed in dislodging him. If the property were to come to Mrs. Curgenven in trust for her daughter, according to the provisions of the marriage settlement, then he was quite certain that his connection with it was at an end.

Mrs. Curgenven persisted in writing. Her brows were knitted, and she breathed in snatches; she was incensed at the insolence and persistency of the man.

'I beg pardon, madam,' said Mr. Physic, 'Mrs. Curgenven is in the fly from Liskeard at the door.'

'I do not choose to see the woman.'

'But really it is necessary that you should. The matter must be sifted out. Let it be done quietly and privately, not in a court.'

Mrs. Curgenven threw down her pen, and turned sharply round.

'Mr. Physic,' said she in an imperious tone, 'that this creature is an unfortunate, I am well aware. It is really monstrous that on the day following the funeral of Captain Curgenven a painful and slanderous charge against him should be raked up—painful and mean to me, his widow, slanderous to his memory.'

'It cannot be avoided, madam. This is a matter that is not to be burked.'

'Mr. Physic,' she spoke with composure due to her pride, 'it is, I allow, possible—mind, I do not say probable, for that it is not—but *possible* it is, that in early life Captain Curgenven may have done foolish, even culpable things. I did not then know him. He was not then under my—I mean I was not then his wife. What he may have done as a boy I cannot say, as I do not know what were the principles in which he had been brought up, and what sort of chaplain

there was to the vessel in which Mr. Lambert was then serving, but that there was any such entanglement as you seem to imply is preposterous. I will not listen to the suggestion. *I* am Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven.'

'Will you not see this lady? She is at the door.'

'Most assuredly not. I am a clergyman's daughter. If I could be any good to her—get her into a Magdalen Home, or something of the sort, I would see what I could do, but to be browbeaten and insulted——' She swung herself round on her seat, took up the pen again, and began to write, or pretend to write.

'This unfortunate, as you are pleased to designate her,' said Physic, 'holds your destiny and fortune in her hands, and is unfortunate in this respect, that she has the giving of the acres of Curgenven, and none of the earth sticks to her fingers; if she establishes her position, she will have only what can be got for her as widow. All depends, as far as you are concerned, on what her decision will be—to whom are to go the four thousand a year.'

'Four thousand stuff and nonsense!' exclaimed Mrs. Curgenven.

'I am sorry to find you so unwilling to enter into this matter privately. It will be far from agreeable to you to have it blazed abroad in all West of England papers, to have it

talked and laughed over by all your neighbours and acquaintances. You will have to vacate this house, and that unfortunate, as you term her, will turn you out of it.'

'Indeed!'

'Indeed she will.'

'And take my place here?' sneered Mrs. Curgenven.

'That I do not assert. She will receive her widow's portion granted by court. You might make terms with her now if you chose. She is extremely poor, and for a few pounds might be induced to waive her claim.'

'Oh! now the truth is coming out. This is an attempt to extort money. I knew as much. She has empowered you to act as intermediary.'

'Not at all. Not a word has passed between us relative to such a transaction. I, in the interests of the family, suggest it. Anything would be better than a scandal. I may tell you now, ma'am, that I knew of this marriage, and a genuine marriage it was, for Captain Curgenven confided the facts to me when he proposed his union with yourself. The marriage took place at the Embassy in Naples.'

'What is your evidence?' asked Mrs. Curgenven contemptuously.

'I have only the word of the late Captain Lambert, and that of the lady he married.'

'Which latter is not worth a rush. You misunderstood my husband. He can have said, and did say, nothing of the sort.'

'I have written to Naples for the certificates.'

'Even if you get them, I will not believe them. Such things are easily manufactured.'

'But a court might not share your opinion,' said Physic. 'And if you persist in refusing to come to a private arrangement, the matter must be gone into in a court of law. You are aware that if the marriage be established, then the will of Captain Curgenven comes into force. In the event of his having been free when he married you, then, of course, the marriage settlement has legal value, not otherwise. If it be proved that he was married and his wife alive when he contracted his union with yourself——'

Mrs. Curgenven started to her feet.

'I cannot endure this insolence! I cannot! I will not!'

'You had better hear me out. I will put the whole matter before you with as much consideration for your feelings as may be, and, believe me, I am acting in your own interest and in that of Miss Alice, and of the whole Curgenven family, in urging the settlement of the matter between the four walls of a private chamber.'

Mrs. Curgenven reseated herself. She set her lips. She was highly incensed, not alarmed.

'If, then, through certain reasons, the will of Captain Curgenven take effect, then this whole estate passes at once to Mr. Percival. Captain Lambert drew up his will after he succeeded to the property, and when he and Mr. Percival had met. At that time the captain believed he was married, and separated from his wife, and he did not accordingly suppose he could marry again. He was greatly embittered against the lady he had married, and when he made his will he bequeathed everything to his Cousin Percival, and to Mr. Percival's son, Justinian, after him. He made no provision whatever for his wife, he did not allude to her in his will.'

Mrs. Curgenven listened, but pretended to be writing.

'Afterwards, when Captain Curgenven had proposed to yourself, madam, he consulted me about his entanglements. I, of course, urged him to make inquiries relative to the person whom he had married, or supposed that he had married.'

Physic saw the lady's hand contract on her pen spasmodically when he referred to the marriage as a fact, and her hand only relaxed when he added the words which admitted of it as supposititious.

'He authorized me to expend a hundred pounds in inquiries, but we learned nothing. Perhaps we instituted our search in the wrong direction. Be that as it may, our inquiries

were resultless, we could find no trace of the lady whom Captain Lambert had married, or thought it possible that he may have married. Then he proceeded to contract his union with yourself, madam.'

Mrs. Curgenven dropped a blot of ink on the letter, uttered a gasp of vexation, and proceeded first to apply blotting-paper to the page, and then to tear the note up, take a fresh sheet, and recommence the letter.

'After his marriage with yourself, madam, I strongly advised the captain to tear up his will, and to execute another, making provision for yourself, and constituting Miss Alice his heiress, should the present contingency arise; that is to say, should it be discovered that his second marriage was invalid. I urged this, not once but again and again, but the captain was very shy of doing what I advised. He was afraid of this will turning up after his death and telling a story he desired should not be known, and which need not be known should the first wife never reappear. He was continually hoping that some news might reach him relative to her death. If that had taken place subsequent to his marriage with yourself, his intention was to confide the matter to you and be remarried to you without any one but your own selves being the wiser for it. Unhappily, Captain Curgenven did not follow my advice. He was a man to postpone to an inde-

finite future the doing of things that were unpleasant. Had he drawn up this second will——'

'He did not do it,' said Mrs. Curgenven, 'for the best of all reasons, because it was unnecessary.'

'Unnecessary, madam! You will soon experience the consequences. You and Miss Alice are left utterly unprovided for.'

'And you dare to insinuate—nay, to assert, that my poor husband ought to have made a will in which he described me as his mistress, and Alice as his illegitimate child!'

'So only could you obtain anything.'

'He never did that. He could not have done it. Neither Alice nor I would accept one farthing under such a will as that. I defy you to prove a previous marriage!'

'Very well, madam. Of course, if you force us to it, we must proceed legally. I am sorry. It would have been so much better to have come to an arrangement without notoriety. You must consider, if this does become public, that it is you, you alone who are dragging the character of Captain Lambert first in the dirt, and then through the mouths of the public. How the Reverend Mr. Pamphlet will like this, I am no judge to decide.'

Mrs. Curgenven was staggered for the first time. She laid down her pen and stood up.

'If this unpleasant affair comes into court, and the decision is given against you by law——'

'Oh, law! law!' said the lady. 'Courts are as generally in the wrong as in the right. I have no opinion of them.'

'Possibly you may judge rightly; but supposing that your claim to be Mrs. Curgenven should be legally disallowed, by what name will you be known? By what name will Miss Alice be known? Will you be Miss Pamphlet again?'

Mrs. Curgenven turned livid for a moment. Then the blood rushed into her face.

'I am a clergyman's daughter! I am Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven! If the law decide in favour of fraud and imposture and wickedness of every kind, I am sorry for it. But I am Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven. It is infamous that this vile, this insulting claim should be trumped up when Captain Curgenven is no more alive to defend himself, and to maintain his honour!'

'Yes, he is dead,' said Physic. 'Do you know what he said to me one day, when I warned him of the rashness of his conduct in marrying again without evidence that his first wife was dead? "By Jove!" said he to me, "if Theresa were to turn up again, I should shoot myself; there'd be no other way out of it." She did turn up, and he did shoot himself.'

'It was accident, pure accident. So the coroner proved.'

'Yes, because the jury and he had not the facts submitted to them on which they could come to any other conclusion. Now, had you not best see the lady who asserts that she was married to Captain Curgenven?'

'I do not choose to see her. If she is in the fly at the door, let the fly take her back again. She shall not cross and pollute the threshold of this house so long as I am mistress in it!'

'I pray you, madam, be reasonable. You are labouring under a delusion when you assume that the lady outside is an unfortunate. She will very soon establish her right to be called by that name which you have arrogated to yourself for seventeen years, and then you will have to content yourself with being Miss Pamphlet.'

'This is intolerable. You are taking advantage of my being unprotected by any gentleman in the house. I must have my father here. Let him be summoned.'

'Very well, he shall decide. He will understand the gravity of the situation. I will, with your leave, touch the bell and send for the rector.'

'As you choose.'

'And then, may I bring the lady in here, that the matter may be gone into fully between us four?'

'No,' said Mrs. Curgenven. 'Did you not hear what I said? She shall not cross the threshold whilst I am in the house and have servants at my command! And I will not leave this house till I am driven out of it.'

'Then, may we go into the bungalow?'

The widow hesitated. She was angry and flushed.

'It will hardly do to have the interview on the terrace, with the maids at the bedroom windows, and the gardener at the flower-beds, their ears open to catch what is said.'

'Very well; you may go into the bungalow.'

'And, madam, will you come to us there?'

'I! and meet that brazen-faced—that abominable creature? I! a clergyman's daughter! Never! never! I am Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven. Let my father see her, and settle as he sees fit. I leave all in his hands, only don't let him ask me to see her, for—I won't.'

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. CURGENVEN, NUMBER ONE.

Mr. Physic went to the hired conveyance which he had left at the entrance to the house. The driver stood by his horse, with stolid face, brushing away the flies that assembled on the flanks and between the eyes of the brute, and addressed it sometimes in terms of flattery and endearment, then in those of obloquy and dislike.

Theresa was inside the cab. She had not dismounted, as the agent had requested her to remain seated till his return, and she had plenty of matter to occupy her brain during his absence.

The position of affairs relative to Curgenven had been explained to her by Physic during the drive. She had a clear head, and she understood it.

Captain Lambert had made his will shortly after his accession to the property, and then, knowing he was married and

separated from his wife, and with no prospect before him of becoming a father, he had bequeathed everything to his Cousin Percival for life, and then to Percival's son Justinian. When, however, a few years later, he married the rector's daughter, a settlement had been drawn up whereby the estates were to descend to the children of Lambert, lawfully begotten, by his proposed wife Jane, daughter of the Reverend James Pamphlet, subject to a charge of three hundred pounds per annum to be paid to the widow after the coming of age of his eldest son, should he have one, or after the marriage of his daughter, should he have no son.

Now as this marriage was invalid, so was the contract; consequently the previous will came into force. But Mr. Percival had up to this time been given no intimation of this. It was advisable that he should not be informed till the Pamphlet family had been consulted. What Mr. Physic proposed was that Mr. Percival should be told the circumstances in a day or two, and that he should take possession of Curgenven, the settlement being privately withdrawn. No one then need know of the scandal, that is to say, if the first Mrs. Curgenven could be persuaded to hold her tongue.

Mr. Physic had thrown out intimations to Theresa on the drive that if she left her interests in his hands, made a friend of him, he would secure for her some pickings. He would

make the Pamphlets 'stump up' and the Curgenvens 'fork out,' so that she need not be solicitous about her future.

But to have one or other party forced to 'stump up,' 'to fork out,' or, to use another of the agent's terms, 'shell out,' through fear of her speaking openly of her affairs was not pleasant to Theresa. She was proud. Her pride had kept her separate from her husband all these years, and though some of it had broken down under privation and weakness, so that she had come to her husband to entreat help, that was a different matter from selling her secret to Mr. Percival to help him into Curgenven, and her silence to Mrs. Curgenven to save her pride from a fall. It was repugnant to her to make merchandise of her unhappy past, but that she should entertain such a feeling did not occur to the agent, who was elated at having an opportunity in his hands of playing off one party against another, and of paying off old grudges.

Mr. Physic's manner had been familiarly offensive, and Theresa had been obliged to treat him with coldness, feeling that the least relaxation on her part might lead to unpleasantness. She resolved on no account to return to Liskeard in the carriage with him, she would either walk back, or, if she went in the cab, require him to sit outside with the driver.

He had hinted something about hunting in couples, about putting their horses together. Theresa's life had not been a

smooth one, but one of the principal ruffles in it had been occasioned by the attentions—sometimes serious, sometimes flippant, sometimes honourable, and sometimes not—of men who had been attracted by her good looks when younger than she was now; and nothing in her tossed career had caused her greater annoyance, more heart-aches and humiliations, than these same attentions. She was weary—weary to death of contest with adverse circumstances, craving for rest as age approached. Whether her personal charms, or the prospect of using her as his tool, had aroused interest in her in this man Physic, she did not care to ask; she resolved to shake herself free from him, and to act independently. She wished to see and speak with Mrs. Curgenven, if possible, alone.

She was still deep in thought when Physic put his terrier-like head in at the cab-window, and said, 'She has her feathers up—the cockatoo. She won't meet you, not she. But get out and come to the bungalow; the old daddy is to be summoned. He's Master Pomposity I can tell you.' Then, turning to the driver, he said, 'You, James, go round to the stables, and make the groom give you a feed. We shall be here another hour, and thank the stars if we get away then.'

He threw open the carriage door and held his hand to assist Theresa to descend. She disregarded his hand, and alighted without aid.

'I particularly desire to see Mrs. Curgenven,' she said, and took a step towards the front door.

'No use. She refuses an interview. Now, look here; don't you put your oar in. If you do, you will upset the boat. Leave all to me, and trust your interests in my hands. They are safe there, safe as my own. I'll see that you get some snips off the cloth. The whole affair needs delicate and experienced handling. Let me alone; trust all to me, and you shall have no reason to complain. Two parties will be under lasting obligation to you, and I'll see to it that this obligation is cashable. There, what more could I do? Come along with me to the bungalow, I have the key.'

Theresa followed Mr. Physic reluctantly across the terrace to the bungalow. He put the key into the door, and let her in.

'There, my dear,' said he, 'to the right is the smoking-room. I'll go after the venerable fossil. Make yourself comfortable and wait for us.'

Theresa entered, seated herself in an easy-chair, and listened to the retreating steps of the agent.

The rectory was distant by road half-a-mile, it adjoined the park, the church was in the grounds of Curgenven. In ancient times the priest lived in the manor-house, was chaplain there, and tutor to the children; thus, in a good number of cases, the parish church is close to the manor-house. After

the Reformation the parsons sought out domiciles for themselves, their wives and familes, and built on the most suitable bit of glebe, consequently many a parsonage is far from the church. At Curgenven there was a short cut, a footpath from the rectory that opened into the churchyard by a locked wicket. The day was warm, bees were buzzing in the window, struggling against the glass to get out. They must have come down the chimney, by no other means could they have got into the bungalow. On the window-sill was a tortoiseshell butterfly that was dying. It had battered its wings in striving to penetrate the glass, as the bees were now doing, till its powers failed or its heart was broken, and then it fell down, and was winnowing slowly with its bruised wings, like the rhythmical movement of lungs breathing, but this was the spasm of approaching death. In the corner of the window a spider had constructed a cobweb with a fibrous tunnel down which he lived, and from which he rushed when a fly was entangled, and drew it into his cave, but when a bee was caught in the mesh he remained quiescent, and suffered the bee to disentangle himself unmolested.

Through the window shone a copper-beech blazing in the sun. No ray of sunlight entered the room, for the window faced the north, but the copper-beech so blazed that it sent a reflected glow through the little room.

Above the copper-beech soared Scotch pines, spreading into flaky boughs, which were laden with rooks' nests. No rooks were wheeling and curving about them now, for the nesting-time was over, and the birds, having long ago reared their young, had gone off to the seaside or the moors for change of scene and air and diet.

Theresa remained in the chair for some time, with the thoughts within her tossing in fitful, disordered fashion, like the waves on an ironbound coast that are broken into confusion of coil and recoil. The pain from her mending collar-bone, the weariness of the arm bound in one position, had produced a slight fever in her blood, that momentarily confused her thoughts. She looked about the little room. In this, Captain Curgenven had lounged reading the papers, smoking his pipe or cigar, had written his letters, and planned his mechanical contrivances. His waste-paper basket was beneath the table, full to overflow with envelopes and old circulars of wines, and damp-resisting paints, and iron-fencing, and lawn-mowers; on the table were compass and rule, some books, a *Stone's Justices' Manual*, for Captain Lambert had been a magistrate, and a notice from the petty sessional clerk of the cases that were to come before the bench next magistrates' meeting, which happened to be the day of Captain Lambert Curgenven's funeral. Against the walls were a picture of a ship—the

vessel to which he had been appointed in the Pacific—and a rack of guns and fishing-rods. The squire had not been a sporting man himself, but he had allowed his Cousin Percival and Justinian, Percival's son, and any friend who asked leave to shoot and fish over his property.

On the mantelshelf were some Chinese curios, and on the floor a pair of well-worn slippers. Theresa did not notice these latter at first, she was looking dreamily through the window at the rooks' nests, and was thinking how that the birds had their homes to which to come and from which to go, but she had never had one of her own. The birds are born in nests, but she had not been born even in a home. Her father and mother had been wanderers, perhaps gipsies. The camp had been in a lane in Hampshire, near the New Forest, when scarlet fever had attacked the adults and the young, and had swept away her father, and mother, and sister; she—the babe—had been left, and had been taken charge of by a kind, good lady, Mrs. Fenton, who lived in a pleasant cottage on the outskirts of the forest. She had been adopted and brought up by Mrs. Fenton, and had been with her till that lady's death at Naples. The rooks were better off than she. Year by year they came back to the same Scotch pines at Curgenven. That spider was better off than she, for he could build himself a home, spin himself a habitation out of his own

bowels. Theresa might have recalled the words of Ralph in Beaumont and Fletcher's old play of the *Knight of the Burning Pestle:* 'To a resolved mind, his home is everywhere.' She had acted on this principle for nineteen years, and it had failed. She was dead-weary of a wandering, an uncertain life. Several times she had received offers of marriage, and might have made herself a home in the New World, but she could not forget that she was bound to an indifferent man, and he stood in the way of her finding a new home. Now, youth was over, her powers had failed, her energies were exhausted, and she longed for rest and security. It was not to be had. She saw how the bees were hammering at the glass to escape. They sought freedom that they might speed directly homeward. They had hives, where they stored their honey and where they could sleep the winter. They were a thousand times happier than she.

The poor butterfly that lay on the table had no home. Her dreamy eyes rested on it, and, as her bosom rose and fell, it kept rhyme with the expansion and contraction of the battered wings of the dying insect.

All at once an idea shot like an electric bolt through the heart of Theresa. She remembered that it was in the bungalow that Captain Curgenven had destroyed himself. The spasm was followed by a sense of numbness, a horror that she

should be on the spot where he had died. Unwillingly, her eyes sank to the floor, searching, with fear quivering in every vein, lest she should there see the stain of his blood. She breathed more freely when she saw that the floor was carpeted, and that it was certainly not there that he had died.

But his slippers were there—his slippers!

Theresa rested her elbow on the arm of the chair and leaned her throbbing brow in her hand, as her eyes observed those down-trodden slippers of threadbare, stained embroidery.

A sense of bitterness had risen in her heart a moment before at the thought of Lambert, when she considered that he had not only not given her the home she sought, but had stood in the way of her finding one for herself; but now, at the sight of these old slippers, a great wave of pity for the wretched man rose in her heart, and rolled over its surface and washed out all the writing there scored against him. He had been hard pressed for money at Malta; he had not known where to turn for it. She had made no allowances for that, and the irritation consequent thereon. Since then she had experienced repeatedly what it was to be in the last straits for money, and she felt that she could forgive Lambert a great deal—if not all—the sorrow and ruin he had brought on her life. There had been mistakes and misunderstandings on

both sides—carelessness on his, resentment on hers. The tears fringed her long lashes.

'I wonder—I do wonder,' she thought, 'whether he ever did think of me, and had any love at all for me?'

She stood up.

It was strange how that then, in the midst of her own anguish of mind, she could consider the suffering butterfly, but it was so. It seemed to her—but it may have been consequent on the fever in her blood troubling her mind—that the pain of the despairing, dying tortoiseshell butterfly was the one thing superadded to her own pain that she could not endure. She moved to the table, acting consciously after a fashion and unconsciously after a fashion, and took the sheet of notices for the Petty Sessions and passed the paper under the dying insect.

As she did this, she discovered the surface of a writing-desk of olive-wood inlaid with little Neapolitan figures, on which the sheet had lain.

In an instant she remembered it, and forgot the butterfly. This was Lambert's old desk that he had had at the time when they were married. There was the little fisherman on it with the red cap, and there the woman with the olive-green gown.

She remembered distinctly how Lambert and she had

laughed to find that one of her keys opened his desk. She had that same key on her bunch in her pocket now. Should she open his desk? Why not? Who had a greater right to do so than herself, his true wife? And she longed to discover whether in that old desk there were any letters of hers treasured up, a lock of her hair, the little miniature of her done at Naples. She had no difficulty in unlocking the desk. She raised the lid and looked in. There were papers there. She turned them over with the fingers of the one hand she was able to use.

No, not a letter, not a lock—but stay!—there was, she remembered, a secret drawer. The ink-pot must be taken out, and the side of the little compartment that held it raised, then that freed the secret drawer. She removed the glass ink-pot, and speedily succeeded in opening the drawer. There was the miniature, there the lock of hair, and something as well—a long envelope, sealed with the Curgenven arms, inscribed, in large letters:

'*My Will.*

'*To be opened only by Mr. Physic, and used by him in certain contingencies.*

'*Lambert Curgenven.*

October 3, 18—.'

What was to be done?

At that moment she heard steps and voices approaching. Mr. Physic and the rector were arriving.

She hastily slipped the paper into her pocket, closed the secret drawer, replaced the ink-pot, relocked the desk, and sank, panting and flushed, into the arm-chair as the door opened and the two gentlemen entered.

The butterfly was still. Its spasmodic wavings of the wings were at an end. It was dead.

CHAPTER X.

THE REVEREND JAMES PAMPHLET.

The Reverend James Pamphlet's face was of the colour of grey granite as he walked from the rectory to the Manor beside Mr. Physic and heard his story.

'Merciful powers!' he exclaimed. 'What will people say?'

He passed his fingers through his white whiskers and drew them out to their full extent.

Unlike his daughter, he accepted the story at once, and was cowed at the prospect of its becoming public.

'Can nothing be done to hush up this unfortunate affair?'

'Everything,' answered Mr. Physic cheerily. 'But Mrs. Curgenven—I mean Number Two—is quite inflexible. She will not see Number One, will not enter into communication with her, and persists that she is an impostor, or has concocted this story in order to extort money. Money, naturally,

it will cost to hush up the facts, and facts they are. I don't know that it is of any particular interest to any one to conceal the facts except yourself and Mrs. Curgenven, your daughter. That they can be kept under a dish-cover without some payment is not probable. Number One is impecunious, Number One has been in America, Number One is not a fool by any means, and when you tott these items together, why —it means money. I believe there is a proverb that "speech is silver, but silence golden."'

The Reverend Mr. Pamphlet felt his gorge rise, as though he were in a rough sea.

'What do you think, now, at the outside, it will cost?' he asked in a faint voice, much like that with which on board ship he would have said, 'Steward, a basin, please.'

'You leave the matter to me. I am a man of business. I have my wits at my finger and toe ends, and a double portion in the tip of my nose. I'll do all I can for you. Put your interests unreservedly into my hands, and I'll do what I can to abate her demands. I tell you what we'll do. We'll get her shipped off to the States again. Reckon on me. I'm heart and soul for you.'

'You see,' said the rector in a tremulous voice, as he took his whiskers with both hands and drew them out to stiffen them, conscious that his limpness of spirit had invaded his

whiskers and had made them droop, 'you see, between ourselves, I am in almost daily expectation of advancement, a canonry, or an archdeaconry, or something of the sort; and if this dreadful affair were to get wind, the bishop might hesitate—might pass me over for a very inferior man, a man, I mean, who cannot put in such claims as myself. You see, my dear Physic, the bishop can't afford to select men for posts of importance if they are not safe every way—safe to have no definite convictions, safe to have nothing awkward in their past, and safe not to go off like rockets in the future. They must select men, you understand, of no marked individuality.'

'I quite understand,' said Physic, 'men in the realm of man, what whiting are among fishes, and Jerusalem artichokes among vegetables, and sago in the pudding realm.'

'I wouldn't put it quite in that way,' said Mr. Pamphlet. 'But—to the point under consideration. What is to be done? I must see this person, of course, and if the story be true, as I suppose it is——'

'About that no doubt at all. I have not the evidence in my hands yet, but I have written to the Embassy at Naples for it, and I may tell you, I've known about it for some time. I knew before the captain married your daughter.'

'Then why did you not inform me? I would not have permitted the marriage.'

'The captain was convinced that his first missus was dead. He spent a hundred pounds in inquiries without coming on a trace of her. The fact is, we went the wrong way to work.'

'How so?'

'The captain was certain she had run away with a Marchese Gioberti who had paid her attentions, and we expended that hundred pounds in tracking the Marchese. But the scent led to earth. He was dead, and none of his relatives would say anything about the lady. Perhaps he had kept it from them; perhaps they did not choose, when he was dead, to say anything about his love-affairs, so we concluded. It never occurred to the captain nor to me that, instead of running away *with* the Marchese, she had run away *from* him. Consequently, when we were searching in one direction, she was off in another, and we neglected the threads which would really have led us to her. Will you believe it? She left her address with the chaplain! It did not for one moment enter into the head of the captain to ask a parson as to her whereabouts.'

'Ah!' said the rector, 'that was fatal.'

'Of course it was fatal. It led us all wrong.'

'It is a dreadful business,' groaned Mr. Pamphlet. 'It must be hushed up—even if it cost money. I am not a rich man. Indeed, I may say I am a poor man.'

'But you will spare what is necessary?'

'I must do what I must,' said the rector, his face and hands becoming bathed with cold perspiration. 'Oh, that I should have come to this! Oh, that Jane had never been born! She had measles when young—about thirteen—and pulled through, and I was so glad then. Oh dear! how little we know what is best for us! And now she will cost me a great deal of money, and may prevent my becoming an archdeacon! Oh dear! oh dear!' moaned Mr. Pamphlet, 'and I have teetotalled under the bishop—just to please him—and been so zealous on the platform against moderate drinkers, and I have denied myself my glass of port—and all for nothing.' He was on the verge of tears. He put one hand over the other and rubbed the back, driving his fingers up the cuffs, with low sighs and moans to himself, forgetful for a moment of the presence of Mr. Physic, so overcome was he at the thought of his reputation receiving a blight, or of his pocket being emptied to save his reputation—or rather the reputation of his daughter.

On reaching the bungalow door, he hung back, and allowed Physic to open and stand waiting for him to pass through. He pulled out a white pocket-handkerchief and mopped his brow, then plucked the agent's sleeve, and said, in a low tone, 'Don't you think it would be better for me not to go in and see her? Should any talk arise, should there be any question

hereafter, I might be able to say that I had had nothing to do with it, that I had not seen the person, and had not entered into communication with her.'

'That is as you like, sir. If you will leave it in my hands, and trust me——'

'And yet—it might cost me more than I can possibly afford. Bless me! I never was so placed in my life before!'

The fact was that Mr. Pamphlet had not absolute trust in the sincerity and disinterestedness of the agent. He had heard enough from his daughter to make him mistrust his straightforwardness, and he thought, for his pocket's sake, it would be advisable that he should be present when a bargain was struck; whereas for the sake of his reputation it were preferable that the bargain should be struck whilst he was looking at the landscape, scanning the clouds, listening to the voice of the thrushes, and meditating on some sublime passage in the Hebrew poets.

'Really, my daughter is the proper person to enter into this negotiation. It concerns her a great deal more than it does me. I dare say you would not mind coming with me to the house, and helping me to induce her to take the conduct of this affair into her own hands.'

'She will not come,' said Physic; 'I've done my best.'

Mr. Pamphlet laid hold of his whiskers, and not only pulled

the white hairs out as far as they could go, but pulled the cheeks out also in which the whiskers were rooted.

'If you like, I'll take everything into my hands,' said Physic. 'I'll be glad to do so. I'm a man of business and you are not. You, you know, sail about in the high atmosphere of theology, and don't often come down to the low levels of common life.'

'But this is *not* common life by any means. It is quite *un*common,' said Mr. Pamphlet in a tone of distress. He did not like the eagerness of the agent to conduct the affair without him.

'After all,' said he, tremulously, 'I suppose it is absolutely necessary that an interview should take place. Is there any one within sight? You'll not say a word about this, now, will you?'

'Not a soul of a word. Come along, sir.'

The agent preceded the rector, whose white collar adhered to his throat, so moist had the latter become.

The delay at the door had allowed Theresa time to recover her composure. When the two men entered, she put her sole available hand to the arm of the chair and attempted to rise, but the rector bowed stiffly and waved to her to remain seated.

'I—I—ahem,' began Mr. Pamphlet, and got no further. Physic at once flew to his relief. Strutting first to this side

and then to the other of the rector, very much like a showman exhibiting a five-legged sheep, or a dealer disposing of a spavined horse, he pointed to Mr. Pamphlet and entered into a glowing account of his qualities. 'See, ma'am, this is the gentleman, the father of the lady whom Captain Curgenven married. He's a rural dean, he is, and rector of this parish, and a perfect model, ma'am, of what a clergyman of the Established Church ought to be; and I wish with all my heart there were more like him. Why, ma'am, the curate who comes to this gentleman is as certain of getting a living as Mr. Pamphlet's waistcoat is of stretching down into an apron, and his hat of curling up at the side and developing a rosette in the middle. Now, you see, to one of his persuasion, in which respectability is all, the situation in which he is now placed is dreadful—is appalling. If his daughter is not Mrs. Curgenven, what is she? No organizing will carry him into a prebendal stall or an episcopal throne with such a scandal as that in his family. You see how overcome he is at the very thought! He is quite pale. He can't even speak—he's all of a quiver.'

'No, no! now, come!' said the rector, in nervous protest.

'Yes, but he is, though,' proceeded Mr. Physic. 'Well, now to the point. You see, my dear madam, we are all of one mind; we all think just the same: that this had better be

hushed up. We don't want to blaze this unfortunate matter about, and heap shame on the grave of Captain Curgenven, and cut away the pinion feathers on which the reverend gentleman is soaring, and blight the respectable name of that worthy lady whom Captain Curgenven so reprehensibly made his wife, without even telling her that he couldn't do it properly.'

'I have no desire to cause pain and humiliation to any one,' said Theresa quietly, rising from her chair, and facing the rector. 'For nineteen years I and my husband were separated. He never inquired after me, and I never held any communication with him. Our marriage was a mistake. I went into it as a child of sixteen—urged to it—not knowing what I was doing; really driven into it, having no other course open to me. I speedily regretted it. Lambert never cared for me except with a passing fancy. I would not have come here to find him out, but that I was driven to do so by necessity. I came, not to ask him to receive me to himself, but to help me to keep away from him.'

'Exactly,' said Physic, 'a little money. We all want that, and go for it where we know we can get it. You were perfectly right. He had four thousand a year, and certainly out of that four thousand was bound to furnish you with enough to live upon. The only wonder is that you did not come sooner.'

'I was earning my livelihood.'

'And, perhaps, did not know that the captain was well off.'

'I did not know that. That I discovered quite accidentally.'

'Well, we won't go into that matter now, it is not to the point. Money you wanted,' said Physic. 'For money you came to Curgenven, and there you discovered things were not quite what you expected. Unhappily, your appearance so startled the captain that—well, it was an accident, we know—his hand shook, and he was shot. I suppose it is money still that you want? You haven't come into a fortune since you arrived here, have you?'

'I wish to observe,' said Mr. Pamphlet in a trembling voice, whilst he deprecatingly waved his hand, 'that my living is not good, and it is saddled with a heavy charge to Queen Anne's Bounty. I am obliged, owing to the elaboration of my organization, to keep the curate, a mission woman, and a Scripture reader. The costs are very great, so that I am in fact a poor, a very poor man. I do most sincerely desire to hush up this dreadful scandal, but my means will not allow me to be lavish. If fifty pounds, or, at the very outside, a hun—I mean seventy-five, could induce you——'

'Allow me to interrupt you,' said Theresa, with haughtiness. 'You entirely misconceive why I am here. I wished to see your daughter, and speak face to face with her. She

refuses me that courtesy. I am sorry. We could then have done without the intervention of Mr. Physic.'

'I assure you, ma'am, the whole matter has been placed in my hands,' said the agent.

'Not by me! I refuse to permit your interference, as far as I am concerned; and as far as I can understand, the only person in the whole affair who holds the key is myself. I am Mrs. Curgenven, and was the lawful, the only lawful wife of the late Captain Curgenven. But, for nineteen years I have contented myself with the name of Mrs. Lambert, or, in professional circles, of Signora Lamberta. I shall be quite willing to remain under that designation for the future. I have not, for nineteen years, talked of my troubles and the wrongs done me, and I have no intention of talking of them now, after he who wronged me and occasioned all my sorrows is no more.'

'I am so thankful, so thankful to hear you say so,' gasped the rector.

'Not only so, but Mr. Physic entirely misunderstands me if he thinks that I am one to sell my silence. So long as the property goes as it was willed, I am content. I will say nothing of the past to any one, nor ask you for one farthing in payment for my silence.'

'Oh, what a Christian! what a true Christian!' said the

rector, pulling out his whiskers, till they stood on end as if electrified.

'I do ask one thing, but that is not money. It is a fact that I am destitute—absolutely destitute. I can earn my livelihood if put in the way to do so. Recommend me, help me to some place where I can be a companion to a lady, or a governess to elder girls, and I will trouble you no more. I am a good linguist, have been well educated, can play and sing.'

'I will do everything I can,' said Mr. Pamphlet with enthusiasm. 'Why, bless me, there is my daughter, Mrs. Boxholder, wants this, and wrote to me only the other day. I'll recommend you to her at once.'

'Papa, you shall do nothing of the sort!' Mrs. Curgenven burst in. Finding that her father had gone to the bungalow, she had so far relented from her former resolution as to follow, that she might hear what went on.

'Papa, you shall do nothing of the sort! How can you! There are Rose and Flora to be considered. And you would introduce a person—a person—lost to all sense of decency, an impostor?'

'Oh, my dear, she is such a Christian! such an excellent Christian! and' (*aside*) 'it will save us some hundreds of pounds.'

Mr. Physic, his beady eyes glittering with anger, brushed up against Theresa, and said aside, 'You fool—you double fool!'

CHAPTER XI.

CROWNS OF SILVER AND GOLD.

Alice Curgenven was a fair-haired girl with brilliantly blue eyes. She had been wandering in the grounds till she tired of the familiar shrubs and trees, and then strayed through the wicket-gate that led out on the moor.

Curgenven stood on the slope of moorland that rose into bold granite tors. It occupied a depression down which ran a crystal stream, brawling over rocks, bespraying banks of moss and dense coppices of fern. The *osmunda regalis* luxuriated here; old oaks leaned over the rift formed by the brook, clothed in the thickest pile velvet of silvery moss shot with green. In every depression of the land the trees grew to good size, but when they endeavoured to top a shoulder of hill they were caught and twisted by the winds.

Alice was not permitted to go by herself unaccompanied into the village, or along the roads, but was allowed to run on

the moor within well-understood limits. On the moor she could come by no harm; there was free innocent nature, wilderness ranged over by sheep, but infrequently trodden by the feet of men.

In the fresh air, laden with the scent of thyme and gorse, Alice rambled on till she came to boggy land, where grew the cotton-grass in profusion. Then she seated herself on a stone, and, after having picked the silver-tufted grass, amused herself with twining the heads into a wreath, which she intended next Sunday to lay on her father's grave.

Whilst thus engaged she heard a slight noise, and looking in the direction whence it came, saw a red head rise above a mass of granite.

Alice uttered a slight exclamation of alarm, and sprang to her feet, throwing down the silver-tipped grass and the half-finished garland.

'Why do you cry out?' asked a girl of her own age who emerged from behind the rocks. 'I am not a pixy. Don't you know me? I am Esther Morideg.'

'Why did you come on me in such a way, Esther? You frightened me.'

'I came to see what you were doing, miss; I be come to have a talk with y'.'

'I wished to be alone,' said Alice.

'Oh! you turned me out of the park, or your mother did, the other day. I might not eat and play there with the rest. I might not look at your pretty flowers and fine trees. I was driven away as a dog is turned out o' church, and now you want to be a queen and have all the moor to yourself too. But you shan't. The park and the fields belong to you, and the down to me. You shan't drive me out o' my kingdom as you drove me out o' yourn.'

'I am very sorry, Esther; I do not want to drive you away. I ask your leave, as you are queen here, to stay in your land.'

'Oh, it don't belong to me. It belongs to nobody but God or the devil, and the pixies. But I belong to it, and so I come to think o' the wild land as mine. I tell y' I've been watching you ever so long. Do y' see that old heap o' stones there? Well, in these old carns there's mostly a chamber, walls, and roof, and all o' great granite stones. Some folks ha' broke into thickey (yonder) carn sarching for gold, and made a hole; and when I want to be out o' the cold wind, or the sun be too hot, and I'd like a sleep, why then I creep in there, and lie there by hours and hours, so as——'

'Are you not afraid?'

'Feared o' what? I reckon it 'ud take a deal to fear me.'

'Afraid of the pixies?' *

* In Cornwall pronounced *pisgies*.

'Them pixies won't hurt me, bless y', I belong to they.'

Alice picked up the fallen cotton-grass.

'There now,' said Esther, coming out from the pile of rocks.

'See! I were i' thickey old carn, and when I looked out o' the hole, I saw you was busy making a silver crown. Then I came crawling down, wriggling all flat on the turf like a long cripple (viper) till I came to the stones, and then I hid and looked at y'. You didn't see I. I can go like a pixy anywhere and anyhow. But look now to this. You was wearin' a crown o' silver, and me a makin' o' one o' red gowld. Look now!'

Esther came forward. She was a contrast to Alice in every way. The latter was a delicate, refined child, with hair almost as pale as the cotton-grass; her complexion was clear, white and pink, and her eyes blue as the speedwell. Esther was somewhat taller, firmly knit, finely moulded, full of physical strength. Her face was tanned with exposure, and she had red hair and hazel eyes. Her clothes were coarse, but not ragged and shabby. Her frock was short, exposing her sturdy limbs encased in thick home-knitted stockings. Her hair was uncombed, in a tangle, and as she came forward she placed a crown of yellow furze upon it. Her eyes were quick, sparkling.

'See my crown!' exclaimed Esther. 'You know what folks sing—

Golden furze i' bloom! Golden furze i' bloom!
When the furze be out o' flower,
Then love be out o' tune.'

She came beside Alice and seated herself on the same block of granite.

'See! mine is of gold and sweet as honey. Yours be o' silver. Yours is but for the month o' June, but the gou'den furze blooms all the year.'

Then putting her hands to her sides, she began to skip and dance, shaking her red hair and the furze crown that surmounted it, singing—

'There bain't a cloud a-sailing by
That doth not hold a shower;
There bain't a furze-bush on the moor
That do not put forth flower.
About the roots we need not delve,
The branches need not prune,
The yellow furze will ever flower,
And ever love's in tune.'

'It is silly singing that,' said Alice; 'what do you or I know about love?'

'But we shall,' retorted Esther. 'You will marry a great man, with carriages and horses, and red jacket, that goes after the hounds, and I——'

'And who will you marry?'

'I don't know,' said Esther, suddenly becoming grave. 'Perhaps a pixy will carry me away—like my mother.'

'What do you mean?' asked Alice.

The moor-girl shrugged her shoulders. 'I can't tell you all.'

Then Alice noticed that a trickle of red blood was running down the girl's brow, and she exclaimed, 'Oh, Esther! your forehead is bleeding.'

'Look at my fingers,' said Esther roughly; 'one can't weave oneself a gou'den crown wi'out blood, I reckon.'

'Then I'd do without one.'

'It don't become the likes of you,' said the red-haired girl. 'Us be made of different stuff. God Almighty He took a bit o' peat and granite grit, and worked 'em together i' His hands, and chucked what He had made out on the moor, and said, "Run along, Esther, that be you!" That's why nobody can't make a scholard o' me. They've a-tried it, and they canna do it.'

She flung herself on the turf full length, cast off her crown, put her arms behind her red head, drew up her knees, planting her feet deep in the bog among the nodding silver cotton-grass, and muttered, half to Alice, half to herself—'No crown for such as I. I'm good for naught but to run wild on the moors

and scramble up the tors. Gran'fer says so. The pixies says so. The school-master says so. And the lady turned me out o' being wi' the other childer, and the beautiful garden and park, 'cos for sartain I don't belong to it, and never nobody can make a scholard o' me, I be a reg'lar good-for-naught.'

'No one is good for naught,' said Alice, 'and surely if you would try you might learn. You come to school so irregularly, that you cannot expect to be a scholar.'

'All the time I be on a bench at school I be on thorns; I'd rather far be rolling i' a furze-break, I would. You may cut my hands off, but I'll never larn them to fashion letters.' She pointed at a whinchat swaying itself aloft above the heather bushes. 'Look to thickey bird there. Would her live i' a cage, dost y' think? No; I reckon her'd die. So would I if I went into the ploughed land and gurt houses. I were born on the moor, and I'll never leave 'n.' She was silent a moment, considering. 'I hope folks 'll never, when I'm dead, take me down and stick me in the ground in the churchyard. One time I clim' up a tor, and there on top I found the bones o' a dead sheep. Her'd climbed up there, and as her couldn't come down again, there her'd died, and there her went away to bones and dust. I'd like that, I would.'

'I can't think how you can like to be on the moor, away from all the houses and the people. It must be very lonely.'

'I reckon the pixies didn't think that when they swarmed away from the hedging, and ploughing, and planting, and enclosing down below. The pixies couldn't bide in the land wi' the folks, so they comed up here. And here they be everywhere. Up to Kilmar I've a-been a' Sunday, and heard their church bells ring.'

'How can you tell such falsehoods, Esther?'

'It be true. And I've seed 'em dance o' a night. Hark! there goes a carriage from your door down the drive.'

'Mr. Physic has been at our house, but I can hear nothing. You must have sharp ears.'

'Aye! and sharp eyes too. One needs both on the moor.'

'Well, I must go home, I cannot stay.'

'I'm not keeping you,' said Esther. And when Alice was gone, she remained, lying on her back in the sun, looking up into the blue sky, the fresh scented air wafting over her, now carrying some of her red locks over her face, then blowing them back again.

She drew her feet out of the peat-water, and put them on the heated rock to dry, and leaned her elbow on the turf, speckled with blue, white, and pink milkwort, and looked into the cloudless sky.

'Lor!' said she, 'that up yonder—God's home—be for all the world like the moor. Not a hedge across it, not an acre

on it tilled. No turnips, no pertaties, only stars. No folks—only angels, and they don't know their letters. They be wild as hatter-flights (jack-snipe) I reckon.'

Then she sang with full lungs—

'There bain't a season of the year,
Nor weather hot nor cold,
In windy spring, in watery fall,
But furze be clad in gold.
Her blossoms in the falling snow,
Her blazes bright i' June,
And love, like it, be ever here,
And ever love's in tune.'

Then she noticed that Alice had left her crown of cotton-grass on the turf. Esther took it up and tried it on, then threw it away and replaced her own of furze.

'Nay,' said she, 'I reckon, though hers be free o' prickles, I'd rather wear one o' gowld.'

CHAPTER XII.

THE DAUGHTER OF THE PIXIES.

THE evening sun fell slanting over her face, and lit a fire in the tangled hair of Esther. She had gone off into a day-dream, looking into the sky, and catching at the white moths that flickered over her.

At length she sat up. To the east the land fell away to rolling ground and valleys full of rich fertility, but in every other direction was tossed-up moor, and here and there a pile of granite.

She rose and took her way to a dip in the waste beneath a pile of rocks lower down the hill-side. Here a brook, whose cradle was among the granite masses above, having gathered body, came dancing down in a tiny cascade over a shelf; and here was a small cottage, hidden behind enclosure walls of stones piled up, their interstices plugged with turf, and their faces draped with white and pink stonecrop. A paddock and

a potato-field lay near the house, and there was also a shed that was formed on the principle of taking advantage of such huge stones as lay convenient, so as to economize the labour of building walls. The house was a little superior to the shed. It was low, of one storey, turf covered, with walls six feet thick, the stones bedded in peat, not lime. The floors were formed of ill-fitting slabs of granite, with black soil in the interstices crammed with relics of feasts, bits of bone, and broken crockery, compacted into a sort of cement. The enclosure walls, erected to protect the windows from being blown in by the winter gales, cut off all prospect. The house was apparently very old; it had an almost prehistoric look about it, so rude and weather-beaten was it; but the rudeness of the masonry and the lichening of the stones were no real indications of antiquity in a district where for centuries the same customs had prevailed—where no tool was used to dress the stones taken lichened and moss-grown from the moor, and piled up as taken to form walls. The cottage had been inhabited, as far back as any could remember, by Roger Morideg, a moor-man—that is to say, one whose duty it was to watch the cattle, ponies, and sheep turned out on the moor within his region.

The moor-man lived all his life in the wilderness, rarely associated with others, lived on horseback, and the cob he rode

would go anywhere, climb rocks, plunge through torrents, and thread the intricacies of a bog.

Roger Morideg's wife was a woman born and bred on the moors, far from church and school, accustomed from infancy to solitude, never going into a town even on market days, and perfectly content to be outside the pale of civilization.

Roger and Tamsin had possessed but one child—a daughter; and as they could not afford to keep her at home doing nothing, when she was grown into a strapping woman she was sent into service in Liskeard. But the girl could not endure the cramped life in a town, and the loss of independence in domestic service. She ran away from her mistress, and was afraid to return to her father. For a twelvemonth she was not heard of. Then she did reappear at the cottage, and died there, leaving to the care of Roger and his wife a little grandchild—a daughter—whose birth cost the mother her life.

'That is what comes o' sending a maid to town,' said old Roger. 'Dang me if ever Esther leaves the moor.'

Tamsin Morideg was much by herself; her husband spent the major part of his time from home. He wandered over the moor, carrying food with him strapped to his saddle, and slept not infrequently in holes among the rocks, wrapped in his cloak, whilst his faithful cob browsed on the short grass

near, ready to come to him at a call in the morning. Tamsin had married young. She saw little of her kind; the neighbours were very distant in regard to situation and quite as much so in conduct. The nearest houses were small farms on the edge of the moor, and the yeomen's wives in them looked down on the wife of a moor-man, and especially mistrusted her because of her peculiar eyes.

Tamsin had had several children, but all had died in infancy save the mother of Esther. All her love for her lost children was concentrated on this little girl. Esther was to her everything—her ambition, her darling, her trouble, and her joy. The child grew up, strongly built, healthy, and very unlike the other children of the parish. Her grandfather paid her little attention, he despised women and girls. His own daughter had disappointed him.

As soon as Esther was old enough to understand, the old woman talked to her of her mother, glad to have the child to speak to concerning her, as Roger would not hear her mentioned. Then the child said, 'Gra'ma, who was my father?'

'Do not speak about it,' answered the old woman, looking round her; 'your mother never 'ud tell, but I reckon he wor a pixy. Your mother wor in a place to Liskeard—one day her wor gone. Nobody never knowed whither her'd gone. A year

and a day passed, and her comed back wi' you, and her died.'

'But, grannie,' inquired the child, 'has my father never come to see me?'

The old woman shook her head.

'I'm sure I canna say. Once when I wor a-rocking your cradle, and the sun were a-streamin' in at the window, right over you, I seed a shadow come on the bit o' counterpane, and I looked up. There I seed at the window a head wi' thick red hair. The sun were shinin' right through his hair, just for all the world like the fern i' winter.'

'Did he say anything, grannie?'

'No; he looked hard, and then I wor scared lest he'd cast the evil eye on you, and I jumped up to get an axe and turn the edge up to cut the charm. But he wor gone in a jiffy. I never seed 'n again.'

The strange stories of her grandmother made a deep impression on the mind of the child, and her imagination began to spin webs of wonder out of the hints thrown out relative to her mysterious origin.

Esther's sixth birthday was marked by an incident that deeply affected her.

Old Tamsin had made a cake, and the child insisted that it should be eaten by the little fall of the brook. The grand-

mother agreed, brought milk, and they sat together on a rock near the pool into which the stream plunged, eating the saffron cake, sipping the milk, and talking.

'Grandma,' said the child, 'what be all they great stone heaps on the high places? they be round as a platter, and some have great pieces of rock stuck up on edge about 'em, in a ring like.'

'They be pixy houses,' answered Tamsin.

'What! does my father live in one o' they?'

The old woman hesitated. 'Sure I cannot tell,' was her equivocating reply.

'Have you ever been inside a pixy house?'

'Never.'

'But my mammy lived there a year and a day.'

'Yes, I reckon—for ought I know contrary.'

'I should like to go inside,' said Esther.

'You must never say that again. You must never go near thickey places,' exclaimed the old woman, looking about her uneasily. 'There be no knowing who may hear you, and if they won't fetch y' away for saying of it.'

'Where to?'

'Why, to pixy land, for sure.'

'What be that like?'

Again the grandmother looked uneasily about her.

'This be no place for talking o' the gude volk. Come within.'

'Oh, grannie, let us bide here.'

But the old woman was resolute, and drew her granddaughter after her back to the cottage. Then she told Esther a wonderful story of a little girl who had been enticed into a pixy house, and had seen there a palace standing on red pillars, and beautiful little people who were feasting; and then her guide took her through a door into a country where there was no sun, but for all that, it was full of light, that shone from Cornish diamonds, *i. e.* crystals, set in the roof. There ran rivers of tin, shining like purest silver, and the trees had leaves of copper that tinkled in the wind that blew through the underground world whenever the door into the upper world was opened. And on the bushes, in place of whortleberries—'urts,' Tamsin called them—grew precious stones.

'What be precious stones, now?' asked Esther.

'Stones of many colours that sparkle and shine.'

'Go on, grandma.'

'Then,' continued the old woman, 'the man brought the little maid back through the door into the chamber as stood on pillars o' red, and gave her a golden cup out o' which to drink, and when her'd a-put 'n to her lips, her fell back vast asleep, sure enough. When her waked, her wor lying outside

of one o' thickey stone carns. It wor eventide, so her up and walked home; but when her came in at the door o' her home, all were changed to what it was. Her father wor dead, and her mother grown a poor ou'd woman. Her had a-been lost for twenty years, and the twenty years had gone by wi' her as an hour.'

'I shu'd dear like to see the pixy world and the precious stone 'urts, grannie.'

'But think, Esther; when you came back I might be dead.'

'I reckon I shu'dn't like that.'

'Come,' said the old woman, 'I'll show you some o' the beautiful things your mother had; her had 'em d'rsay from the pixies.'

The child sprang up: 'Oh, do'y, grannie, show them me.'

Tamsin accordingly ascended a broken ladder, to a sort of loft in the roof, followed by Esther. The place was dark, and was a receptacle for rubbish of all kinds. In it was, however, a cypress chest sketched over by a red-hot iron with devices of men and women hunting with hawks and dogs. She dived into the depths, and drew forth a small case, which she put on her knees and opened.

The child crept close to her and looked, marvelling at what was produced—a coral necklace and a pair of Roman pearl ear-drops.

'What be they for?' asked Esther in a whisper.

'Them white things be for the ears. It's o' the likes o' they, so Scriptur saith, the gates o' heaven be made. The chain be for the neck.'

'Oh, grannie, put the chain over me.'

The old woman did so.

'Now, grannie, put on me them ear-things.'

'I canna wi'out boring o' the ears.'

'Then bore them, sure.'

'You'll cry, you will. It will hurt.'

'No, I won't cry. Try me, grannie.'

'Then us must go down again,' said the old woman, and she and her grand-daughter scrambled down the ladder, the child wearing the coral necklet, Tamsin holding the ear pendants.

Then Tamsin got a large needle and pierced the little girl's ear-lobes, and let her have the pearl drops to look at during the operation. The child uttered no exclamation of pain.

'Now put them i' my ears, gran'mother.'

Whilst Tamsin was engaged decking out the child with the pearl pendants, suddenly she looked up and uttered a cry—

'He be there! He be looking in at you!' and she pointed to the window.

'Who, grannie?'

But before the old woman could answer, the door opened, and Roger Morideg came in.

'What be you about?' asked the moor-man angrily; 'rigging up the little maid i' them fandangles o' her mother's. You'll be bringing her to the same end, putting follies into her head. Take them things off at once, and put 'em where you found 'em, or I'll e'en take 'em myself and sink 'em deep in ou'd Dosmare Pool as has no bottom at all. Never you let the maiden have them again—mind that.'

'Oh, Roger, you gave me a turn, looking in at the window like that.'

Esther stood erect, her head thrown back, her hazel eyes full of pride and pleasure. The great ear-drops hung down and rested on her shoulders. Now and then she cautiously bent her head to look at the coral chain that hung over her bosom.

'Take 'em off!' shouted the grandfather. 'Do you not hear me, Tamsin? Would you have the child go the same road as her mother?'

'Oh, gran'fer! but the pixies gave 'em to my mother.'

'I'll tell y' what,' said old Roger angrily, 'the sort o' pixies as went after your mammy 'll be after you, if you don't give up them things. Never you touch 'em again, or I won't be answerable for you.'

Tamsin Morideg, with trembling fingers, removed the chain and the ear-rings. She was uneasy at what she had done; she really knew nothing of who Esther's father was. To satisfy the child's curiosity, she had invented the fable of the pixy husband, and by repeating it had come to half believe it herself. Her daughter had returned with these ornaments. They were of no real value—sham coral and sham pearl—but they were priceless in the estimation of the ignorant moor-man and his wife.

After this incident, little Esther gave her grandmother no rest. She was continually asking for a sight of the treasures, and her imagination played with the thought of them and of the stores of jewellery in the pixy world underground.

When Esther was eight years old she was sent to Curgenven to school. The way was long, over moor and stream, and it was not a matter of marvel that on rough days she did not appear. But she failed even more frequently on fine days. On these latter the moor was too delightful a playground for her to leave it, the air too pure for her to like to exchange it for that of the National school.

When she was at school she made no friends; she held herself aloof from the other children. They belonged to the narrow, enclosed lowland, and she to the broad and free uplands. They had nothing in common. She did not know

their games—'There came three dukes a-riding by,' or 'The Ringdove,' or 'The Robber Knight.' She came from a direction in which were no houses, and had consequently no opportunity of picking up a companion on the way. The other children were unable to amuse themselves when alone, they congregated together for their sports, but Esther was never more able to entertain herself than when alone.

One day, soon after Liskeard fair, the little girls showed each other the pinchbeck rings and the chains of glass beads their mothers had bought for them at the booths. Esther laughed scornfully, and boasted about her gold and pearl and coral treasures, which were to be hers when she was grown up. The children crowded about her to hear of this jewellery, and in her pride she told them that it was pixy treasure from the nether world. From that moment she was regarded with envy by the little girls, and was an object of mockery to the boys. They called her the 'Pixy' and the 'Changeling,' and instituted a persistent persecution of her. Esther was usually able to hold her own, but when surrounded by a throng of boy bullies, she was overmatched, till one day, when greatly tormented, she gasped forth—'Tak' care now! I'll send my pixy father to torment you.' Then the boys broke into a loud guffaw. 'And my grandmother, her shall ill-wish you.' At this latter threat they fell back and slunk away.

Tamsin Morideg, probably on account of her peculiar double-irised eyes, but also because of the solitude of her life, far away from all neighbours, was regarded as a wise woman. People came to her to have their swellings struck (*i. e.* touched), and brought her the kerchiefs of those who had wounded themselves, that she might bless the blood on them and so stay the flow.

They came to her, when racked with rheumatic pains, to inquire who had made clay figures of them, and were sticking pins into them. They came to her when their cows failed to give milk, and when the sheep were 'cawded,' to learn how to break the spell that was on their cattle. Partly because the profession of being a white-witch brought her in gains, but chiefly because she was thoroughly convinced of her own powers, Tamsin Morideg encouraged the popular superstition.

Thus Esther grew up, steeped in belief in the reality of the supernatural world. In this world she lived in imagination, and revelled with delight. The actual world, with the men and women and children in it, was outside the sphere of her thoughts and sympathies. She continued to come to school now and again, in careless fashion, as the caprice took her, or when her grandfather interfered to order her attendance, but she learned nothing when there, her mind was incapable of fixing itself on books and feeding off black-boards.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TURNIPIKES' COTTAGE.

The Reverend Mr. Pamphlet and his daughter were returning to Curgenven in a gig from Liskeard one afternoon shortly after the funeral. The daughter drove. It was characteristic of the rector that he preferred being driven not only in a gig but in his parish. As pastor he followed his sheep; he led them nowhere, but organized them as they sauntered browsing along. He followed his parishioners very much as, according to Horace, Venus follows her swans, sails along 'vinctis oloribus,' but, unlike Venus, with absolutely no control over his swans, satisfied to let them go their own way, so long as they were linked into some sort of system and sang hymns void of dogma and inflated with vapid sentiment.

The road from Liskeard was very much uphill, and the rectorial trap had proceeded slowly, the rectorial cob not being disposed by constitution, habit, and age to run uphill.

The autumn tints were showing in the woods. The oak coppices had put on chestnut livery. That livery was laced with gold where a beech tree had asserted itself by quicker growth, and the woods were dappled with sombre green where Scotch firs rose above the coppice.

The air was fresh. There had been frost during the night, and now that the sun shone warmly on the trees, the leaves descended in showers of copper and gold.

'I am very much afraid that Jesse will never recover that jam of her ear in the gate,' said Mr. Pamphlet, looking at the off-ear of the grey cob, an ear which hung forward and waggled helplessly, whilst the near ear stood erect. 'A sinew must have been torn. To have one lobe asleep whilst the other is awake spoils the look of the cob, and if I could exchange or sell her I would do so. People might think it hardly consistent with my position to have a horse with any peculiarity about it. Have you heard any remarks made relative to it, Jane?'

'Really, papa, I cannot think of the cob now. Nothing you will say or can say—I am sorry to have to seem disrespectful, but say it I must—nothing will make me alter my opinion relative to that creature.'

'What—the cob? There can be no doubt about it, she got her ear jammed in a gate.'

'I am not speaking about Jesse at all, but about that woman. She is a low, cunning, profligate adventuress.'

'My dear, I think you are hardly justified——'

'Papa, in these matters women are better judges than men. If a woman has a plausible manner, a good pair of eyes, and——'

'Jane, for shame!'

'It is a fact. A clever, unscrupulous woman can completely hoodwink the wisest and best of men; whereas to a sister woman's eyes her cunning and falsity are conspicuous.'

'But you have seen her only once.'

'Once too often. That was enough for me to judge. But the very fact of her daring to make such a claim as to be Mrs. Curgenven stamps her—stamps her—brands her.'

'But, Jane, what if it be true?'

'It can't be true! how can it be? I am Mrs. Curgenven. As for my not being justified in condemning her, I think, with all due deference, papa, that you somewhat surpassed the bounds of that caution which so conspicuously surrounds you, when you recommend her as a governess to the Box-holders. Surely Rose and Flora have precious souls, and to put in association with them, to put over them, at their tender age, a woman of such abandoned character is at least injudicious.'

'I entirely demur to what you say of her. She has been tried and has proved her worthiness.'

'Oh, of course, you stand up for her against your own daughter.'

'No, my dear, I do not stand up for her against you. I am protecting you against yourself. Your obstinacy in refusing to look at the possibility of her story being correct may involve you in disagreeable consequences, and may interfere with my influence for good in reclaiming the evil and confirming the good.'

'I absolutely repudiate the woman's story. I don't mean to deny that Lambert may have done silly and even wrong things when he was a young man; but that he could have married that creature, and then have proposed to and married *me* without a word about his previous union—papa, it is preposterous! Stuff and fiddle-sticks!' She settled herself more firmly and resolutely on her seat. 'I am Mrs. Curgenven, and there is no other—there can be none other, save me.'

'Well, suppose it was as you say, and that Lambert was involved in some cobweb, nature undefined, in his early youth—is it not better that this should be swept away instead of being brought to light?'

'I allow that. *I* don't want to stir up scandal with respect to Lambert. He was, I always knew, and did not mind saying

so whilst he was alive—and I don't mind saying so after he is dead—a dear, good, happy-go-lucky fellow, who was easily led into anything. A good woman could lead him aright, and I flatter myself that whilst I had the management of him, he was a regular church-goer, subscriber to all the charities, and even taught in the Sunday school. But what he might have been in other hands, I cannot say.'

'Well, let the past be hidden, it is best so for you and for me. I have written to recommend her to your sister, as I conscientiously can, and that will get rid of her from this neighbourhood. It will take her to Scotland, and it is a matter of supreme consequence to put the greatest tract of country possible between her and this place, between her and you and me.'

'Yes, but that is not all. You are placidly surrendering my three hundred a year and Alice's position of heiress of Curgenven. By accepting this trumped-up story, you ruin Alice's future, and you make Curgenven over to Percival, who is as unfit to be a country squire as is that cob I am driving.'

'The sacrifice is very great, I allow that,' answered the rector, 'but great as it is, nothing short of it will secure you against a terrible exposure and the chance of what I dare not contemplate, so disastrous would it be to my prospects—I

mean my moral influence in the parish and in the rural deanery.'

'I do not like—indeed I resent with all my soul—the admission that there may be truth in this cock-and-bull tale. It is such a barefaced attempt to extort money. If I had my way I would prosecute the creature for it.'

'And drag the memory of your deceased husband in the mire?'

Mrs. Curgenven gave an impatient jerk of her head. 'Poor Lambert! no. I suppose one must sacrifice one's own feelings, one's own comfort, to save him that. This is what comes of thoughtlessness. A good-natured scatter-brain is always bringing other people into trouble, and costing them endless contradiction. Well, if it must be! Why, good gracious! There is Mrs. Pike! And not yet churched!' The exclamation and diversion of Mrs. Curgenven's thoughts were caused by the appearance of a couple of riders who dashed past at a gallop.

One was a very small man in tight jacket, and such close-fitting breeches, that one would suppose, having been got into them, it would be impossible for him to extricate himself from them again. The other rider was a young woman with dark ringlets, in a blue cloth habit-skirt. Both were mounted on well-bred young horses.

The male rider touched his cap with the handle of his whip to the rector as he passed.

'Well, I never!' exclaimed Mrs. Curgenven. 'Not two months passed, the babe of course unweaned, and she riding out in that barefaced manner. What are the lower classes coming to!'

'I suppose she is practising the horse, and getting it accustomed to the flapping of a skirt—it is their business.'

'Their business, indeed,' said Mrs. Curgenven; 'it is scandalous that a woman who has not been churched should appear on the high-road in a riding-habit.'

'Of course she ought to have been churched, and the child is not yet baptized.'

'Five children under eight, and the youngest not two months old—and a blue habit too! Upon my word, she must be spoken to; and, papa, as soon as ever we reach the cottage, I will go in and see how the children have been left. Five under eight years, and the youngest not two months old. It is frightful! It is unnatural!'

'And I'll see Pike about the cob. He may manage to exchange her for me. As rural dean I think I ought not to drive a horse the tendons of whose right ear are broken. It might materially damage my moral influence.'

After driving for about a quarter of a mile, Mrs. Curgenven

pulled up at an octagonal cottage by the roadside, against a bank and bed of trees. The house had been a turnpike keeper's lodge, but the pike was abandoned, the trust dissolved, and now the cottage was let to a horsebreaker of the name of Pike, who, from his residence, acquired the popular designation of 'Turnipike,' with the epithet of 'Little,' due to his diminutive size.

Mrs. Curgenven knocked at the door, which was shut. She met with no response, but presently heard a scratching sound within, and then the latch clicked, but the door was not opened. Mrs. Curgenven then put her hand on the latch and opened the door, and in so doing nearly upset a child of seven who was trying with a stick to reach and unclasp the latch.

The widow went into the cottage and looked about her; then she came back hastily to the gig and said to her father, 'You may drive on, papa, I cannot in conscience leave these children to run the risk of destruction. One poor little mite had fallen on the hearth, and would certainly have been burnt had not the fire been out, most mercifully. There is another has got hold of a knife, and she might have hacked off her brothers' and sisters' fingers, only, most mercifully, the knife won't cut. There was a pickle-bottle on the table full of milk, and the stem of a tobacco-pipe stuck into it for the

baby. I should not in the least be surprised if that careless and unnatural mother had never properly cleaned out the pickle-bottle, and there may be a piece of mustardy cauliflower left in it. Anyhow, the children have knocked or pulled the pickle-bottle over, and the milk is spilled on the floor, and there are three of the little things round the puddle lapping it up with their tongues, like young kittens; and as the floor has not been washed ever since the Pikes came here, there is absolutely no saying what amount of filth, and of what description, they are taking up into their systems along with the milk.'

'Well, jump in, my dear; I'll speak to the mission woman about it.'

'I cannot indeed,' said Mrs. Curgenven. 'If anything were to happen to those poor little mites after what I have seen, I should never have an hour of peace again. I shall remain here and look after them till that unnatural mother returns; then, of course, my responsibility will be at an end.'

'But, my dear Jane, how will you get home?'

'The distance is but a mile and a half. I will walk when Mrs. Pike returns. Never mind me. Drive on, and if you like to send John back for me you may—and yet no, I will walk. Jesse has done quite enough for to-day.'

Mrs. Curgenven was a good-hearted woman, always ready to

do a kind thing, but never able to do it in quite a kindly fashion. She would go out of her way to do for another person an act which exhibited extraordinary consideration, and yet leave that person tingling with resentment at the manner in which the obligation was conferred. Not one woman in a score, not one rector's daughter in a hundred, not one squiress in a thousand would have done what she now undertook—to manage a swarm of untidy, dirty babes in a cottage, whilst the mother was away exercising a horse. But it was quite certain that on the return of Mrs. Pike to her home and her babes, Mrs. Curgenven would give her a piece of her mind with such force and asperity that the horsebreaker's wife would like, if she dared, to turn her out of the house.

Mrs. Curgenven waited till her father had driven along the road, and was out of sight, and then she set to work to put the children and the cottage to rights. In the first place, to see that the baby in the cradle had not been smothered, so preternaturally quiet did it seem; then to pick up and remove from the milk-puddle those who were lapping it and the dirt under the milk as its condiment. Next to examine the bottle, and discover that it was broken by its fall. Then Mrs. Curgenven routed about the house in search of a cloth with which to mop up the liquid. She found two or three, one an old stocking, so torn as to be useless; another made out of a waistcoat, but

that was steeped in paraffin ; and whilst she was examining a third, in doubt whether it were an article of clothing still in use, or one discarded and degraded to be a floorcloth, she was surprised by an exclamation in the doorway of—

'Hallo, Jane ! what are you doing here?'

She turned round, and saw Mr. Percival and his boy Justinian, both very dusty and hot, with long bamboo walking-sticks in their hands.

'And what brings you here?' asked Mrs. Curgenven, thinking it easier to throw the burden of answering a question on Mr. Percival, than to explain the reason of her being in the cottage.

'Me! Why, I want Dick — Dicky Turnipike. I want him to look out for a nice cob for Justin and a hunter for me.'

'But I have come from Liskeard and did not overtake you,' said Jane.

'No ; the fact is, we walked out to Curgenven, to look about the place. It's an astounding thing, is it not, that I should inherit it? Never dreamed it was possible, but Physic tells me it is to be so, and he ought to know. We were sorry you were out. I took the liberty to ask for lunch, as Justin and I were thunderingly hungry; and we did justice to your cold beef, and all.'

'I am sure you were heartily welcome. You have had a long walk. Why did you not tell James to put the horses into the wagonette and drive you home?'

'It will do us no harm to walk—neither Justinian nor me. I did not like, you know, to make too free.'

'Oh! everything I suppose, by this wonderful shuffle of the cards, is yours.'

'It is a wonderful shuffle,' said Percival. 'I say, young shaver'—this to his son—'you cut along; I walk faster than you, and will catch you up. I want a word with Cousin Jane.'

When the boy, with a pout of dissatisfaction, had gone forward, Mr. Percival turned to Mrs. Curgenven and said, 'It's a rum piece of business altogether, and I don't understand it. Of course, it is all right—Physic says so.'

'It does not in the least follow that it is all right because Mr. Physic says it. If you think so, you believe in him a great deal more than I do.'

'Well,' said Mr. Percival, seating himself on the table, 'I don't mean that altogether; but, of course, he couldn't do anything in the matter unless it were right. How I become legally the inheritor, beats me.'

'And it is enough to beat any one but—there, I will not say what I think. I protest against it morally, though legally

I will not contest your succession to Curgenven. It is a most extraordinary affair altogether since that woman has dropped among us all from out of the clouds. No,' said Mrs. Curgenven hotly, 'I won't say that she came from anywhere so near heaven, since she popped up upon us from a direction quite the reverse.'

'What woman?'

'What woman!' repeated Mrs. Curgenven testily. 'If Mr. Physic hasn't told you, why, I do not care to do so. The long and short of the matter is this. That abominable creature——'

'What creature?'

'Oh, you know—she with her hand bound up.'

'The signora!'

'Call her what you will except Mrs. Curgenven. For pity's sake don't call her that. She has the effrontery to say that she was married to Lambert, and that, therefore, his marriage to me was naught. It is one of the grossest attempts at imposition I ever heard of.'

'Whew!' Mr. Percival whistled, and slipped off the table.

'You may well whistle. The story is incredible. It is beyond possibility of belief except by those who are deranged. My father thinks it better to let the will take effect which gives Curgenven to you rather than rake up a foul and disgraceful scandal. I don't agree with him. That woman's

proper place is the treadmill. It is conniving at fraud to remain inert However, all the men are against me, and I can't help myself. And there is just this grain of common sense on their side, that, by leaving matters alone, we save the memory of Lambert from being aspersed, and he, dear fellow, is no more here to defend himself. Now you know why you are to be Squire of Curgenven—by sufferance, not by right. Excuse me if I speak with vehemence; a great wrong is permitted—it can't be helped, I suppose—but a great wrong is done to me and my child.'

'Whew!' again whistled Percival, and then began to laugh.

'What are you laughing at?' asked Mrs. Curgenven.

'Excuse me, it is so droll—really, the Signora La Lamberta —good Lord—to be Mrs. Curgenven after all!'

An angry retort from the incensed lady was checked by the dashing up of the Turnipikes to the cottage door.

CHAPTER XIV.

GOLDEN FURZE IN BLOOM.

Justinian Curgenven walked on slowly—sauntered rather than walked, to allow his father speedily to catch him up. He had a long bamboo cane in one hand, as tall as himself, in the other he swung a couple of rabbits.

There was no one visible on the road. On one side the coppice, with a few larger oaks where the soil was not so shallow and the rock not so near the surface as higher up the hill. The valley-bed was marshy, rushes grew in the meadows there, and a stream meandered through the bottom, changing its course after every flood. The hills on the further side rose abruptly, and were but partially clothed in woods; at the summit was dense heather.

Justinian was a handsome boy of nineteen, with large soft brown eyes and dark hair. Any one knowing the family and seeing him lounge along, attracted to one hedge by scarlet

vaccinium leaves, then to another to observe a squirrel, or who saw him stand to listen to the wild laugh of the green woodpecker, would have said that he was as desultory and irresolute and thoughtless as his deceased cousin and his father. But such a conclusion would be premature, for he was idling along, killing time with a purpose—awaiting his father, who had promised to catch him up—whereas the two whom he might have been thought to resemble slouched along life without any reason for taking it easy—with, in fact, every reason for not doing so. As Justinian walked along, his eyes on all sides and his ears open, he heard a crackling of dry wood among the bushes on his right, and, looking in that direction, saw a girl—it was Esther Morideg—binding together a faggot of sticks tightly with a rope.

'Hallo! what are you doing there? Stealing, eh?' shouted Justinian, and ran up the bank towards her.

'No more stealing than you,' answered the girl. 'You've a-been poaching.'

'I have not,' retorted the boy. 'The keeper gave me the rabbits.'

'Oh, ah! the keeper can be mighty free wi' what ain't his own. I've knowed 'n give something better nor rabbits afore this.'

'That is neither here nor there. What's your name?'

'I don't care, but you may know—I be Esther Morideg.'

'Where do you live?'

'Out on the moor under Boarrah.'

'You have no right here, taking wood.'

The girl slung her bundle over her shoulder and leaped lightly into the road.

'Thickey be my way,' she said, pointing over the heathery hill on the further side of the stream. 'And I be going to take the firing, whatever you mun say.'

'You are stealing, you know you are.'

Without further regarding his remonstrance, the girl took to her heels, and Justinian, nettled at her audacity, ran after her.

Finding that he was about to outstrip her, Esther turned sharply round, and whirled her faggots by the cord that bound them, swung them about Justinian's bamboo, caught it, and with the weight of the wood wrenched it from his hand.

'There,' said she; 'now let me go my road. You've naught occasion to say I be stealing. What's that to you if I be? But I bean't. Miss Alice and me be good friends, and her'd never deny me a few sticks for firing.'

'Miss Alice has nothing to do with them.'

'Her has though—her's squire now, I reckon.'

'No, she is not. My father is squire.'

'Your father! And who be he then?'

'Mr. Percival Curgenven. What do you say to that? Put down the sticks and give me up my bamboo.'

'Take 'em if you can,' said the girl. 'You can catch me up fast enough on the road—I can't run on that; but let me be on the moor, and I'll beat any horse, I will. Now then, my road be yonder. I'll run wi' my bundle and this stick, and see if you can catch me, eh?'

'Done,' said Justinian. 'And look here, if you beat me you shall have free right to pick sticks in our woods as long and as much as you like. My father never denies me anything, and I'll promise that for him and for me. What's more, I'll give you a distance—I won't be beaten by a girl.'

In a moment, over the bank she leaped, carrying the faggot on her shoulder, and holding Justinian's bamboo in her right hand, and ran like a hare over the marsh, leaping from tuft to tuft of rushes. She had got some way before the boy had realized that she was off, and then he pursued her, delighted to have some fun whilst waiting for his father.

But hardly had he got into the marshy mead near the water than he floundered in over his ankles, then up to his knees, and was forced to labour forward with difficulty.

To his vexation, he saw the girl on the other side of the little river. She had crossed it, had put down the faggot and

was sitting on it, laughing and watching him as he toiled in slow pursuit through the bog.

It irritated Justinian to hear her shrill laughter and the clapping of her hands, as he floundered deeper and deeper the more vehement his efforts to get forward.

At length, bemired to above his knees, he did reach the brink of the stream, and then he looked across at her. His tall bamboo was leaning against her shoulder, like a rod of gold in the evening sun that smote down the valley, and her wild red hair glowed in the same light like a halo of copper in the furnace about her handsome face, rich in colour as an apricot from exposure to the winds. Her hands were raised and outspread to clap again in applause, and one end of the rod rested against her thrust-forth foot. Justinian had something of the artistic faculty in him, and he was struck by the picture before him. His ill-humour disappeared, and he shouted, 'I shall catch you up yet!' then dashed into the water.

Instantly Esther was afoot, had thrown up the faggot and started for the wood and hill. At this point the river swept close to the roots of the hill, so that there was no more swamp to struggle through; but there was a hedge to be climbed, made very compact to prevent bullocks from breaking into the coppice and destroying the young pines planted in the gaps between the oak-stools.

Esther surmounted the hedge like a squirrel and began to run up the steep hill-side, aided materially by Justinian's staff. The stools of coppice had sprouted; they were of some five years' growth since last 'rended' for bark, and the young oak, Justinian thought, must catch the sticks of the faggot and arrest the girl; but she was perfectly prepared for the difficulty. She tossed the bundle of sticks upon her head and held it there as she scrambled upwards, dodging the clumps of oak till she had traversed the coppice zone and was out on the heather. There she gained rapidly, and speedily reached the summit of a fine slate rock that rose abruptly from the slope and was scrambled over by ivy and crowned with heather and sloe-bushes.

On reaching this point Esther, with a laugh, knelt, threw down her faggot, and, ripping the sloe-berries from the bushes, began to pelt Justinian with them as he ascended. He was panting and hot, and by this time aware that he was unequally matched against the wild girl, who ran up a hill-side, steep as the slope of a Gothic roof, with as much ease as if it were level ground, and who, as her laugh proclaimed, had not lost breath in so doing.

'Will y' now consent that you're beat?' asked the girl of Justinian, as she stooped on one knee on the rock. 'I'll throw y' down your stick if you will.'

'I will not,' gasped the boy, mortified, but not prepared to acknowledge his ill-success. There was smooth turf above the heather, and he trusted to gain on her when on less steep ground and on ground less dense with shrubs.

'Very well,' said Esther, 'then I'll run again.'

She picked up her bundle, and started once more, mounting swiftly and without apparent toil.

When she did reach the turfy head of the hill, she set off at a run, whereas Justinian was out of breath, and unable to get any further till he had recovered wind.

Esther turned, after she had run a little way, and seeing that he made no efforts to pursue her, she came back, but allowed sufficient distance to intervene between them so as to give her the start of him should he resume the pursuit.

'Come here,' he said, 'I'm beat. Let there be *pax* between us.'

'I don't know what *pax* be,' she said suspiciously.

'Let us be good friends, then. You said you were that with my Cousin Alice. You shall be the same with me.'

'I reckon I will wi' a' my heart.'

At once, with perfect frankness and absence of doubt in his sincerity, she threw down the faggot, and came forward to him, extending her right hand, holding his tall bamboo in the left.

He was breathless and hot, the drops of perspiration stand-

ing on his brow. He cast aside his cap, and then took her hand.

'All right,' said he, 'we're chums! I never thought to be beat in anything by a girl. What a wind you've got, you cat, and how you climb!'

'It a' comes o' where you run,' said Esther, willing to lessen his mortification by a concession. 'If 'twere on a road, you'd outrun me i' a score o' strides. But on the grass it be different. You've been 'customed to roads, and I to turf; that's what makes it.'

'You'll give me back my bamboo?'

'The stick? for sure I will. There you have it;' she put the staff into his hand.

Then Justinian held out to her the pair of rabbits he had been carrying.

'There,' said he, 'take these. I give them to you with all my heart. I did not get them by poaching. I am the young squire, and all Curgenven belongs to my father. I have a right to all the rabbits. Take them, they are for you, and you shall have more another time. Do you live in one of our houses, on our land?'

'I live out to Tolmenna—that's under Boarrah.'

'I suppose it is ours. The Curgenven estate, I know, is large. Well, I promise you, you shall have sticks for firing

as long as you live on our estate, and shall not need to buy or ask. I give it you. My father will always allow what I promise.'

'Thanky,' said Esther, 'I'll e'en take 'em, and I kiss your hand for 'em.'

She stooped to suit the action to the word, and, as is done in Cornwall still, pressed her lips to his hand.

'Well!' said Justinian, snatching away his hand, 'that is the reverse of the proper order,' and he suddenly caught her face between his hands and kissed her on the cheek.

She drew back offended and flushing scarlet.

'Nay!' she said angrily, 'I won't have the rabbits now.'

'You shall. If you won't carry them home, I'll go after you to Tolmenna with them to your mother.'

'My mother is dead.'

'Then your father.'

'You won't find him—he's a pixy.'

Justinian burst out laughing. 'Then I quite understand why I was beaten. There, take the rabbits, I meant no harm, honour bright. Now look here, what is your name?'

'Esther.'

'Then we're chums, are we not? You'll not run away from me again. I hear my father calling down below. He will be wondering what has become of me.'

Justinian shouted into the valley to Mr. Percival, and then, waving his hand to the girl, plunged down the hill.

She stooped, reloaded herself with the faggot, and tossed the pair of rabbits on it, and went forward on her way home. Thoughts were working in her mind, a cloud and then a gleam passed alternately over her face.

Suddenly she stood still, and, throwing up her head, sang a snatch of her favourite song :—

'There bain't a saucy lad I wot,
With light and roguish eye,
That doth not love a pretty lass,
And kiss her on the sly.
There bain't a maiden i' the land
From Hartland Point to Brent,
I' velvet or i' fustian gown,
That will his kiss resent.
Golden furze in bloom!
Oh, golden furze in bloom!
When the furze be out of flower
Then love is out of tune.'

And as she went onward she hummed the tune to herself, but always to the words of the same stanza.

Justinian had reached the road where his father stood awaiting him.

'Why, boy! where have you been the while?'

'Up yonder, father.'

'What have you been doing?'

'Making acquaintance with the tenants.'

'Oh! that is right. Where are the rabbits?'

'I gave them to the tenant.'

'That is well; get on good terms at once.'

'Certainly, father.'

'These farmers get as many rabbits as they like without asking.'

'This was not a farmer, father.'

'Not a farmer? Who was he?'

'Not a he at all.'

'Oh! be judicious, boy, don't be on too good terms with the tenants—that is to say, those who are *shes*. You understand.'

CHAPTER XV.

A REFUSAL.

Theresa was in the little up-stairs parlour of Miss Treise, that served as show-room. She was packing her box. In the event of a customer arriving to be tried on, fitted, or measured, Theresa was enjoined to throw a damask cover over the box, so as to give it the appearance of being an ottoman.

She had brought her little writing-desk out of the bed-room to place it in the box, near the bottom; but before doing so she seated herself on the sofa, with the desk on her lap. She was tired, and would rest a moment before proceeding with the packing.

She was to leave Liskeard for Scotland on the morrow, having closed with Mr. Pamphlet's proposal that she should enter into his daughter's service as governess and companion. The offer had been accepted without alacrity, for it was not one that greatly tempted. The salary was not high—forty

pounds—the duties somewhat mixed. She was to help Mrs. Boxholder in housekeeping, entertain her in wet weather and when her spirits were damp, and educate her two daughters. One was to be finished off, and the other begun with her schooling; this latter, having been delicate, had not been pressed, and might be said to know nothing, whereas her elder sister was, according to Mr. Pamphlet and her mother, an extraordinary genius, vastly well educated.

Theresa had gone through many phases of life. Her mind and heart had opened under a kind old lady who had indulged and petted her. Then, as a mere child she had been plunged in the eddies of life, and swept into marriage before she was well aware what it meant—thrown up into this state because there existed no other in which she could take refuge. She had been neglected by the man who had sworn to stand by her and protect her. They had both rubbed their eyes and found themselves unsuited to each other, and he incapable of supporting her; they had discovered, moreover, that neither cared for the other. Then she had plunged back into the torrent into which she had been cast before, relying on her own strong will and abilities, and for nineteen years had been battling with the stream, now submerged, then rising to the surface, swimming to sustain life, not to reach any shore. When young and sanguine she had hoped with her efforts to

gain some place of security. She had long ago abandoned that hope. She must strike out merely to enable her to inhale a few more lungfuls of air, see a little more of the light of day. It was but a matter of time, and then she must fold her weary arms and sink.

She had tried her fortunes in several directions. When the attentions of the Marchese Gioberti at Malta became annoying, and were liable to affect her honour, and she was unable through lack of means to pay her bill at the hotel, and go away, she had appealed for help to an American lady at Naples, who she knew was shortly returning to New Orleans. She stated her case, and offered to do anything, everything in her power to be of use to the lady—to be her companion, her lady's-maid—if she would release her from her embarrassments. The lady had at once responded to the appeal, with characteristic American generosity; Theresa had joined her at Sorrento, and gone with her to the States.

Unwilling to be a burden, she had striven to earn her own livelihood as a teacher of music and of languages. Then she had become a public singer in concerts, and had even ventured on the stage. In no case had she met with success sufficient to kindle in her the confidence that she would be able to look to her future without concern.

She had encountered discouragements, met with rebuffs that

had wounded her to the quick, and had been courted with attentions still more galling. Thrown entirely upon herself she had been forced, like a beast that has many enemies, to develop tact, to exercise caution, and to maintain a determined courage.

A long sickness had consumed what savings she had collected, and had deteriorated her voice, so that she could not expect with that organ to earn her bread for the future. There were no other resources left her but to be a sempstress or a governess.

As she sat, holding the writing-desk, a sense of her loneliness came over her. She had no place that she could in any way regard as a home, and no one to whom she could cling as a relative; she had not even a friend. When she had taught young girls, her heart would sometimes yearn towards a pupil, but after a term or two the pupil left, the growing affection was arrested. In her professional career as a singer she had made acquaintances, but before acquaintanceship ripened into friendship, engagements in opposed directions interrupted the growth.

When Theresa was in Rome she had seen in the Pædagogium on the Palatine Hill the scrawl of a slave, that represented an ass turning a mill, with its inscription, 'Work away, ass, as I have worked, and it will profit you as much.'

She was going again to the mill, to trudge her round, and little profit would it bring her. She saw before her naught but a future of dull and deadening routine.

The little desk in her hand was all that remained to her out of her early life. It had been given her on her fourteenth birthday by Mrs. Fenton. It recalled to her the kind tones and looks of the old lady, the touch of her caressing hand. She remembered how, in her childish troubles, she had taken refuge on her lap, and snuggled her head into the bosom of her mother by adoption, and been coaxed and petted till she was happy again. Since the earth had closed over the dear old lady, Theresa had met with no sincere love. She had been scorched by the transient flare of the passion of Lambert Curgenven. She had longed with a tender woman's heart for sympathy, for affection, but had found neither anywhere; and now she had come to suppose it never could be had. When she was old, and sick, and failing, who would care for her? When she was borne to her grave, who would follow her?

Her namesake, the Spanish mystic S. Theresa, had in vision found herself seated with her face set to a blank wall—not even lined out into blocks of stone. The sense of weariness in thus gazing at blankness became intolerable, and she cried out, and asked where she was. The answer came, 'In hell!'

Somewhere or other Theresa had met with this story, and

it was to her as though she could now realize something of the oppression and numbness of mind of the saint, as she looked at her own future, in which was nothing to awaken interest, nothing to encourage hope, nothing to satisfy desire.

She was startled from the reverie by hearing a voice on the stairs—'All right, Bessy, I can find my way up!' and in another moment Mr. Physic was in the room.

'How do you do!' he exclaimed, holding out his palm.

'Excuse me,' answered Theresa, 'I have but one hand I can use, and that is engaged.' She slightly raised the desk.

'Not yet well! My dear, what a long time it takes to patch up a collar-bone. Well! I have good news for you. The old parson has commissioned me to act. His daughter is too proud to come and see you, and she won't let him come. But here'—he took out a purse—'here are ten pounds for you, to pay journey money and for necessary outlay.'

'I decline to receive a present,' said Theresa.

'Don't. Take it as pay, and shabby pay it is. If you chose to go into court and prove yourself to have been the lawful wife of the captain, no doubt in the world but you could get an order and obtain an annuity out of his estate—say three hundred. That parson and his daughter are indebted to you. They know that. Besides, you save Mrs. Jane's

good name, which is to her above everything. You place her and her father under a lasting obligation, and could make them spoon out more jam than this, if you chose. But let it be by little. If you know how to manage it, you can get a hundred pounds at any time.'

'You misunderstand me,' said Theresa haughtily. 'I had no such meaning, and have no such intention. When I say that I refuse a present, I say that this money, which I am constrained to accept, so as to pay Miss Treise what I owe her, is regarded by me as a loan, so far as it is not expended on my journey. Mrs. Boxholder has undertaken to pay for that.'

'As you please; but for pity's sake do not cut off your nose to spite your face—and such a pretty face, too.'

He seated himself on the sofa at her side.

Theresa at once rose, and stepped from him.

'Why do you get up?' he asked.

'We can talk together with more comfort when face to face, and with my box between.'

'Well, this is not civil to me; and I have done my best in your cause, managed your affairs famously, and without pay —so far.'

'What do you ask?'

'Oh, none of your ten pounds; I am not so mean as to take pickings out of that.'

He looked at her and compressed his lips.

'Now, look here,' said he, 'I can quite understand that your position was one of difficulty when the captain was alive, a difficulty, by George, that did not trouble him greatly. But now you are free to contract a new marriage, and a woman of your good looks——'

'Mr. Physic!' said Theresa, the blood darkening her cheek, and her brows contracting, 'I pray you spare me words that might force me to leave the room. I am glad you are here, for I have a duty to perform.' She put the desk on the little table, and, opening it, produced the envelope she had taken from the desk of the deceased husband. 'I am bound to give this up to you—bound by what is written on the cover.'

Mr. Physic sprang to his feet; a look of blank surprise came over his face as he snatched the packet from her hand, read what was inscribed on the envelope, and hastily turned it about to assure himself that the seal was unbroken. The large red sealing-wax impression of the Curgenven arms was intact.

'By Jove!' said the agent, 'the very thing I have been wondering did not turn up. I knew he had written it, but was not sure he had not destroyed it again. Where the deuce did you find it, and how the dickens did you come by it?'

'I found it in his olive-wood desk, in the room of the bungalow, I think you call the place—where I was put.'

'And, you sly rogue, you took it?'

'I took it. I did not suppose any one else had a better right to it than myself. My key opened his desk; it had done so when we were married.'

'I am not surprised, then, that you quarrelled,' he continued, turning over the envelope.

'You did not possess yourself of his seal, open this, and refasten it?' He looked suspiciously at her.

'I did nothing of the kind. On the cover is a requisition that this should be put into your hands, and yours only. I fulfil the wish of my poor husband in doing this. You are to use it or not, so I read, according to circumstances.'

'Yes. In the event of a certain thing happening, undefined, but known to me, I might use this. You can't guess what that contingency was?' He leered at her.

'I do not trouble myself to ask. I am quite sure the enclosed does not concern me.'

'Oh, no; certainly it does not.'

'You know the contents?'

'In a measure. I was consulted.'

He looked at the cover, then at Theresa.

'By Jove!' said he, 'I'm glad Mrs. Curgenven—old hawk

—did not pounce on this. Do you think she'd have cared about what was written on the cover, and given it to me unopened? Not she; for one, because she detests me, and would have turned me out of the agency years ago if she could have brought the captain to it; and for two, because she is too pious to be conscientious. She'd have peeped in, and once her nose in——' He smacked his lips. Then he thrust the packet into his breast-pocket. 'Why, my goodness! dear, you've done me a great favour, you have indeed. Bless you! bless you!'

He put his hands behind him, under his coat-tails, and standing with his feet wide apart, ruminated for a while. 'Look here,' said he, 'if you won't sit by me, then, you sit down on your box, and let me occupy the sofa, and we'll come to some arrangement between us.'

'There is nothing to arrange.'

'My dear! nothing to arrange! There is everything. You have done me a great favour, and I am not ungrateful. I am ready to return the favour. What do you say, now, to having me? I've never been married on the sly before, and given the wife the slip, as did somebody; but, *de mortuis*, you know.'

'You are very kind, Mr. Physic, but——'

'Oh, sit down, I pray you be seated; take the box, the

cover will bear your weight. Now let us rub our noses together and arrange about it.'

Theresa thought the best way of parrying what was coming was to laugh and say, 'I am not accustomed to rub noses with any individual, certainly not with a gentleman. As you see, I am busy packing. Our business together is over, since you have handed me the ten pounds, and I have handed you poor Captain Curgenven's will, or whatever it is. I will go into my own room and write a receipt, and send it you by the maid, Bessy. As you perceive, I am busy.'

Mr. Physic rubbed his eyes, then his nose, then his knees. 'Lawk!' said he, 'I'm refused! Who'd have thought it? What is the world of women coming to? They've neither taste nor manners.'

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE TRAIN.

THERESA started for the station an hour before the train was due. This was because the one omnibus which the town entertained had to ramble about the place picking up such persons as had notified their desire to be picked up and conveyed to meet the express up train. Liskeard is not a town in which the pulse of life beats furiously, nor the whirr of commerce turns heads giddy. Except on market day there is very little business done in the shops, and except when the one omnibus jaunts about seeking travellers, very few persons are visible in the streets.

But when that lumbering conveyance waddles about the town, every one rushes to the window or to the door to see who is going to leave Liskeard, and to conjecture the reason and the duration of absence. The draper is outside growling because such and such ladies are obviously going into Ply-

mouth for a day's shopping, instead of accepting and being thankful for such bad matches in colour, such short lengths of material, such antiquated patterns, as he has in stock; and the grocer in his apron is on his doorstep, objurgating because certain customers are going into Plymouth to bring home real oysters and salmon, instead of resting content with his tinned preparations. The omnibus halts at the vicarage to receive a deputation from some missionary society, and to lay on the roof his portmanteau, one compartment of which is stuffed with scalps, idols, and tomahawks, that have been exhibited the preceding evening at a great meeting in aid of foreign missions, in the school-room, and then bounces off to one of the inferior inns to pick up some professionals who have been giving a nigger concert in the town-hall, and who have their costumes and musical instruments with them, all to be accommodated on the roof. Then the omnibus rolls away into a suburb to take up a lady who is going out of her mind, and is attended by a keeper. Next it rambles off in an opposite direction into another suburb to collect some children who are returning to school, and sob in the omnibus when they do not howl. Finally, it picks up commercial travellers here and there, with their familiar boxes of samples. At last, when the hour is nearly expended, the omnibus directs its way towards the station.

Theresa had been able out of the ten pounds given her by Mr. Physic to satisfy Miss Treise, to fee the servant, Bessy, and to extinguish the trifling accounts against her in one or two of the shops. She then had sufficient money left to carry her to Scotland,—sufficient, not too much, though possibly there might be a few shillings over, when she reached Drumduskie, the residence of Mrs. Boxholder.

An inexplicable sense of regret came over Theresa as she left Liskeard. There was no reason why she should regard it as a home, and yet she felt that it was the only place in the world with which she was at all linked, the only place to which she was not absolutely indifferent. It was the town to which Curgenven looked as its headquarters. The only person who had belonged to her—Captain Lambert—was buried near there. Mr. Percival had been attentive and kind to her, he was the cousin of her dead husband, and he lived in Liskeard. She had passed through an epoch of her life there —great pain and anxiety of mind—and the place where one has suffered does somehow exercise a hold over the feelings. She was going to Scotland—entirely strange to her—and to persons whom she knew by name only. She was sorry not to have seen Mr. Percival and thanked him for what he had done for her, but he had not been to see her for the last two or three days, he had been busy at Curgenven. She resolved to

write to him from Drumduskie, and express to him her sense of obligation.

She had taken her ticket for London, by Plymouth and Exeter, and had seen her box labelled. She was making her way into a second-class carriage of the express, avoiding equally that into which the deputation thrust himself and lugged his portmanteau, and that which the nigger melodists invaded, and that into which the madwoman was with difficulty forced, when a hand was laid on her shoulder, and turning, she saw Mr. Percival Curgenven.

'By Moses!' said he. 'My dear patient—you off! and never a word of farewell. There she goes—in with you, quick; and by the powers I'll come too—as far as Plymouth—I want a talk.'

The train was in motion, but he helped Theresa in, and then, in spite of the exclamations of the guard and station-master, he swung himself in and shut the door, then looked out, and waved his hat mockingly at the station-master and a porter who had endeavoured to pull him on to the platform by the tails of his coat.

Mr. Percival turned round, laughed heartily, and threw himself into a seat.

'The fun of the thing is,' said Mr. Percival, 'I haven't more than a fourpenny-bit in my purse, and I haven't a ticket. I

say—Signora! no, I mustn't call you that any more—patient! can you lend me the needful? Now is not this a rum situation? Here am I, Squire of Curgenven, with an estate of four thousand a year, and haven't more than fourpence in my purse. I had a few shillings, but I spent them over a fish-cart in buying some soles I paid for. Now I have only fourpence. Can you help me?'

'What do you want?' asked Theresa.

'I don't know. Only a couple of shillings or so, to take me to Plymouth. When there I suppose I can get money. I'll go to the bank, anyhow, and see what they will do for me. I've no account there. I never had a banking account in my life, for I never had any money to put into the bank. But they knew my dear old Lambert's cheques to me—and they must take my word for it that I am squire now, worth in prospect four thousand per annum, with—unless they will help me—less than fourpence, for I shall owe you my fare.'

Mr. Curgenven looked round the compartment to observe whether it were occupied by any person he knew. Having satisfied himself that all were strangers, he said to Theresa, 'I say—now where are you off to? Not that humbug Mrs. Boxholder, I trust. Not off to the Arctic regions?'

'I am going to Drumduskie.'

'Well, there—what an odd state of affairs it is for you and

for me. Here am I a wealthy man who is penniless. Yesterday in despair because I thought my hundred and fifty was at an end, now elate because of my four thousand coming in, but just at this present moment fallen into destitution and obliged to borrow a couple of shillings of you, because I can't finger what is to be mine, and have spent all that was mine. I went in for those soles to have a flare up with Justinian, thinking I was a millionaire.'

It was not possible for Theresa to refrain from laughing, notwithstanding her depressed mood.

'I say, patient,' pursued Mr. Percival, 'can you lend me five shillings? Then I shall have enough to take me back for certain, without running the risk of being snubbed at the bank. They know me at the Liskeard branch, they don't know my face at the Plymouth shop.'

'I cannot spare you much,' said Theresa, 'for really I am pinched. I do not know what my fare will be from town to Edinburgh, and thence on to Drumduskie.'

'Bother Drumduskie—you shan't go there.'

'I must indeed. I am engaged.'

'Cut the whole concern.'

'I cannot do that. I have no other means of livelihood: besides, I have had my journey money advanced.'

'Oh, hang it! you've been treated abominably. I know all

about it now. Signora, have you any cotton wool in your reticule? If so, do let me have it to plug up that old gentleman's ears. I don't want him to be made acquainted with our family affairs. Our family—that does seem odd. By the way, Signora, why did you not tell me your real name at Frisco?'

'I did not care that any one should know it, but I will admit I was drawn to feel an interest in your poor wife by the name she bore.'

'Well, all I can say is, old Pamphlet and the madam have got rid of you uncommon cheap. Lord! to think of her—that pink of prudes, that paragon of propriety—finding herself to be a very improper character indeed, no better than she should be—it is simply killing. But you don't know her, and have not suffered from her as I have. Bless you! she has never liked me. She sat on pins and needles whenever I came over to Curgenven, and could hardly contain herself from being rude. Dear old Lambert, she would have led him a life, but that happily he did not mind it, everything slipped off him that she heaped on; and he as cheerful and cool as possible. I say, amiable Jane would melt into her boots if you blew upon her; she would, upon my soul. Her position, her morality, her nose-in-the-airedness are to her everything, and life would be insufferable to her without them. You keep dark, and she lives. Blaze out your tale, and it will eclipse her.'

'I am not going to blaze out a tale I have kept to myself these many years.'

'But really, it seems monstrous that you should come off no better. You have to think twice before you advance me five bob, lest you should not have enough money to carry you to Dustyfiddles—no, Dustydrums it is.'

'You must remember the sacrifice she is making—she loses Curgenven.'

'That she loses anyhow. She should pay you something worth having for keeping a very unpleasant secret.'

'But suppose I absolutely refuse payment?'

'No—do you?'

'Absolutely. I was offered it and I refused.'

'Well—upon my word, you are hard used. But, Signora—no, hang it! I won't call you that, and something else I suppose I mustn't call you; I can say cousin, and dash me but I will.'

'Very well,' laughed Theresa; 'say cousin then, if that will please you.'

'Yes, I can say so in a railway carriage, where no one hears me, or is the wiser if he does; but I can't say it elsewhere, not in Liskeard for instance.'

'I am not in Liskeard, and shall never be there again.' A little sigh escaped her.

'By Jove, that's hard. I say, cousin, I got hideously tired of being kicked about like a football, and was everlastingly thankful when dear old Lambert settled me at Liskeard—the missus wouldn't allow him to quarter me anywhere nearer—and relieved me of embarrassment for the future. Have you never felt sick of being kicked about?'

She did not answer. He looked her frankly in the face, and saw the pain and desolation written there.

'By Jove, Theresa, it shall not be. Hang me to the telegraph wire poles if it be so. I shall have four thousand a year—fancy, such a chap as I, who never in his life before had more than a hundred and fifty. I who was perfectly happy in a Pill-box must stretch myself out in a manorial mansion. Good Lord! who'd have thought it? It makes me astonished beyond measure at my good luck whenever I think of it—and that is all day long. So I am in a continual state of tearing amazement. But I say, Theresa—hang me if I won't call you that—I can easy cut you a slice off my cake. How much will you have? Three hundred?'

'I'll have none, thank you, but the five shillings you will owe me.'

'Tickets, please,' said the collector, opening the door.

'Here—I haven't got one—she'll pay for me,' said Mr. Percival.

Theresa furnished the requisite sum.

'You're the gent as got in when the train was in motion at Liskeard?' asked the collector.

'Yes, that is he—and, sir! you have made yourself liable to penalties,' said the guard.

'I say, old chap!' answered Mr. Percival, 'a word in your ear. I am now Squire Curgenven of Curgenven, and I shall travel up and down by your line, and not forget the conductor. You understand—only just now, I've but fourpence.'

'Right, sir!' Then—'Your good lady's dress is in the way of the door.'

Percival turned round and laughed. 'I say, Theresa, did you hear that? I wonder now how long we shall be at Plymouth before your train goes on. I've a great mind to go on with you as far as Exeter, and see you safe through those confounded tunnels in the red sandstone that are incessantly tumbling in.'

'You cannot indeed. Fourpence will not suffice; and I can lend no more money.'

'Well, then, I must be content to see you off. Hang me! I don't half like it. It was as pleasant to me to talk to you of old times and old scenes, and of my poor dear wife, as it was for Lambert to have me to talk to, a bit of relief from the

old cat. What do you say to this? Will you occupy the Pill-box when I move to Curgenven?'

'Indeed I will not,' said Theresa. 'I have told you I must earn my livelihood.'

'You are an obstinate hussy.'

They had reached Plymouth. Some carriages had to be shunted. Theresa got out, and so did Percival Curgenven. They walked the platform together. Then he dashed away to the bookstall to buy some illustrated papers—swept together a *Punch*, an *Illustrated London News*, the *Field*, and the *Queen* —and found he had not the money to pay for them. He was forced to surrender all but *Punch*, which he brought to Theresa.

'It is a hideous nuisance,' said he, 'I can't give you more than this to amuse you on the way. Confound it—I wish I were going to Exeter with you. You'll be lonely and dull.'

'Now then!' shouted the guard. 'All for London take your places. Will you and your good lady step in, please?'

'There he is again,' said Percival, as he helped Theresa into her second-class carriage. The guard turned the handle.

'I'm sorry about the illustrated papers,' said Percival, looking in through the window. 'And mind, going through the tunnels, to keep your head in. I'll not forget the five bob. I'll write; Drumduskie—that's it.'

The train was in movement, he ran beside the carriage, with his head in. 'I say, let it be as he said; why not? My good lady—and Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven.'

'Now then!' a shout from a porter. He was caught by the shoulder and pulled away, without receiving his answer.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT THE VAULT.

Mr. Percival Curgenven came to Curgenven to take possession in the Curgenven carriage that he had ordered to be at the Pill-box for him.

He more than half expected that he would be welcomed by a peal of bells from the church tower, but was mistaken. With that tact which so characterizes our English peasantry, the ringers felt that after the tragic death of the late squire, and with the retirement of the widow to the parsonage, a merry peal would be out of place. They knew that a peal would be honoured with a sovereign fee, but they forbore the fee rather than make their bells jar with the feelings of their rector's daughter and the orphaned child.

Mr. Percival was excited and joyous; it was a great day for him to come in as representative of the Curgenven family into the ancestral home, a great thing to escape from penury

into wealth, and he thought that not all Curgenven only, but Liskeard as well, should be excited and rejoice with him.

But his elation subsided towards evening. He had rambled through the rooms, and had begun to feel that there was not in them the cosiness of the Pill-box, and that with many servants many sorrows began. But there were other causes to damp his excitement.

'Please, sir!' said the footman, 'there's Mr. Huxtable would like to see your honour!'

'Who's Mr. Huxtable, John?'

'I believe, sir, the farmer at Tregolwyn.'

'I'll come and see him. Show him into the study.'

Percival followed the footman, and was soon shaking hands with a heavy-browed, dark-haired, high-cheekboned man, broad in the shoulder and at the hip, who walked clumsily, and who with himself introduced into the library a strong odour of stable-yard.

'Beautiful day,' said Mr. Huxtable.

'It is. You want to see me?'

'I'm ray—ther afraid if we get rain now, the sheep may get rot in their feet.'

'There is a danger of that, I suppose.'

'And how do you feel yourself now, squire?'

'Oh! very well, very well indeed. You wanted to speak to me, I believe?'

After much beating about the bush, discussion of the weather, the price of fat stock, the condition of the turnips, the yield of wheat to the acre, Farmer Huxtable came to the point. It was this:

'Well, sir, I thought I'd come airly and see your honour. The late squire never somehow could find time or money to put my outbuildings to rights, and there's the roof of the linney falled in, and the cowsheds be that deep in water, with there being no drain, and the airth outside bein' higher than the floor, that it's over-cold for calves and they dies; and the pigsties be against our house wall, and there be great cracks as you might put your fist through, and the smitch' (smell) 'comes in strong enough to turn the strongest stomick; and the chimney o' the sittin'-room do smoke terrible; my missus hev gone to the ex-pense o' papering the room, but lor' bless your honour! the paper be all black wi' smoke already. Her wants a proper register grate putting in, and the chimley raisin'; and her thinks if the floor were lowered the room 'ud be a better height; and the rats run about the corn-chamber and eat a bushel a night; and if your honour would have it cemented all round, and fresh floored wi' sawn slates, it 'ud keep out the rats; and the doors and basements han't been

painted these eighteen years and be all gone rotten as touch-wood, and if your honour would come and see, they won't hold together another winter. And the roof o' the pound-house be nigh blown away——'

'And what do you think, Mr. Huxtable, the repairs will cost?'

'Well, sir—I d'rsay five hundred pounds 'ud do something towards it, but to make it as it should be—I d'rsay it 'ud cost about double.'

A rap at the door, and John came in.

'Please, sir, when you are disengaged, Mr. Obadiah Matters would like to see you, sir.'

'Well, Mr. Huxtable, I'll come over to Tregolwyn and see what must be done—but a thousand pounds is a great sum.'

'Well, sir, I could put up, maybe, wi' five hundred this year, if your honour 'd spend another five hundred next year. I'll talk to the missus about it.'

Then he was shown out, and Mr. Obadiah Matters was shown in. This was a farmer on a large scale. Three decent farms had been amalgamated. When Captain Lambert came into the estate he found Tregowan, Llandhu, Leswith were farm-houses, with ruinous outhouses and ruinous themselves. They and all the farm buildings needed rebuilding; the cost of each would be about fifteen hundred pounds. At the

advice of Mr. Physic, Captain Curgenven threw the three together and built large and admirable barns, stables, farm-house, at Tregowan, and pulled Llandhu and Leswith down, or turned what remained into fairly sound cottages. This extensive farm was taken by Mr. Obadiah Matters. His daughters read French novels and played operatic music.

'How do, sir, how do?' said Mr. Matters patronizingly. 'I've come to see you at the outset, squire, that there may be no misunderstanding later. I suppose Physic has told you about me.'

'Oh yes,' said Percival Curgenven, 'he informed me that you pleaded inability to pay any rent last court, and that you were five years in arrear.'

'I did not mean that,' answered Mr. Matters hastily; 'I meant the conditions on which I stay on. I have insisted on a billiard-room being built for me and my friends, and a lawn-tennis ground being dug out on the side of the hill for my daughters. It will be quite impossible for me to take on the lease again without these additions being made to the place. We can't pig it as did our ancestors.'

'I think if you can't pay the rent, I will not ask you to take on the farm for another lease.'

'You'll get no one else. Tregowan is too large for any West-country farmer, and no man from the eastern shires

will come here—and if he does, he won't understand our land or our climate, and so will speedily come to grief. You must have me or no one, or break up the farm into three or four, and that will cost you a pretty penny in buildings—more than my billiard-room and my daughters' tennis ground.'

'I'll talk it over with Mr. Physic, but I don't think, Mr. Matters, you'll find me very pressing to induce you to stay.'

'Oh, indeed—I'm sorry then for you.'

'Please, sir,' said the footman, coming in, 'there's Sir John Carmynow in the drawing-room, sir.'

'I'll be with him immediately. Good-day, Mr. Matters.'

On entering the parlour, he was greeted with cordiality by the baronet.

'My dear fellow, I've come over the first thing to call. I've a lot to ask you, and I thought I'd do it at once—at once and done with it. Glad to welcome you into our neighbourhood, and may you be a support of the pack and a prop to the Conservative cause. In the first place, how about the hounds? Captain Curgenven helped liberally towards the maintenance of the hunt. You see, my dear friend, we are none of us about here rich men, and not one of us can keep a pack alive. They say it costs a master a thousand for every day he hunts in the week. Well, two for foxhounds and two for harriers, that makes four thousand—and it has to be raised among us.

We'll put you down for the same as poor Captain Lambert Curgenven, I suppose?'

'Oh yes, certainly.'

'And then—how about politics? You'll subscribe to the registering agent—but that's not enough. There's, as you know, an election coming on, and we must all work. You must be chairman of the Conservative meetings here, of course, and you must do your utmost.'

'Upon my soul,' said Percival, 'I've no political principles at all. I believe Great Britain is going to the dogs, and 'pon my life I don't know whether it would not be best with the Radicals to get her torn to pieces and done for finally as dogs' meat, and have it over, or try to stave it off, with the Conservatives. It is a satisfaction to take the pound from him who doesn't know its value, and give it to him with ten, who does know its worth to a penny.'

'Please, sir—the rector!' said John, showing in the Reverend Mr. Pamphlet.

'Why, Percival! how are you? How well you are looking!'

Presently, after some promiscuous conversation, Sir John Carmynow left. Then the rector, drawing close to Mr. Curgenven, said—'I've called in, just to make sure how we stand. I suppose you subscribe the same to the schools as we had from Lambert?'

'I suppose I must.'

'And to the clothing club?'

'Yes.'

'And to the coal club?'

'I suppose it is necessary.'

'Oh, absolutely. And to the shoe club?'

'How many more?'

'Oh, only the blanket club.'

'That is all, is it?'

'Well, there is the parochial lending library—but a guinea will suffice for that. I didn't quite gauge your views in matters theological, and so I don't know *which* you would support, the mission woman or the Scripture reader.'

'Oh, by Jove—I've no theological views whatever.'

'So much the better, then you will pay for both.'

'Thank you—you are very kind,' said Percival ironically.

'Then,' continued the rector blandly, and passed his hands through his white whiskers, 'some of us have been thinking it would be so nice to fill the east window with stained glass as a memorial to poor Lambert. I am sure the poor will gladly contribute their pence and the farmers their sixpences, if you will head the list. I think it might be done for a hundred pounds. It is a large window, you know. I will

give five pounds, and poor dear Jane another five—out of her penury, casting in all that she can; and perhaps we could get together ten pounds in the parish. That will leave only eighty—and to you as squire that is nothing.'

'I think that must wait. I don't know on my soul what I shall have. The income of this property is nominally four thousand, but I find there is a mortgage on it of two hundred per annum, and the repairs and rebuildings will cost me at least a thousand a year. Put me down for nothing till I have had time to turn round and feel how I sit in this new seat. At the present moment, Mr. Pamphlet, it looks very much to me as though the outgoings were commensurate with the incomings. Sir John Carmynow has been here about the hunt.'

'But the church and parish first,' said the rector in a tone of solemnity.

Before sunset the new squire sauntered to the churchyard; he heard the notes of the organ sounding through the open door. Some one was practising. He had his pipe in his mouth when he passed through the graveyard gate, and he did not remove it from his mouth, but walked slowly, meditating, towards the Curgenven vault, that stood outside the south aisle of the church, and was covered with a large slate slab. Beneath that slab lay the captain.

With his hands in his pocket and the pipe in his mouth

Percival stood looking at the slab, with the newly-cut inscription on it recording the interment of the late squire.

A reaction from the excitement had set in, and some moisture formed in his eye. He drew one hand from his pocket and removed the pipe from between his lips. Then he seated himself over against the family burying-place, on another stone, stretched his legs before him and remained with his chin on his breast, the pipe on his knee feebly sending forth a slight fume, and considered—he almost thought aloud. His lips moved, forming the words that rose up in his mind. 'Dear old boy! I'm confoundedly sorry for you, old chap. It takes all the pleasure out of my advancement to think that I step to it over your jolly old body. 'Pon my soul, Lambert, I'd a hundred thousand times rather be back in the Pill-box, and you in Curgenven. Who the deuce shall I have to talk to and play billiards with, and smoke a pipe, and drink a glass of whisky toddy with now, old boy? Peace be to your ashes, my dear Lambert,' said he aloud, and knocked out some of the dust from his pipe on the slab above the vault; then put the meerschaum to his lips again and puffed away vigorously to restore the glow. 'I swear to you, old man, I'll do what is right as far as I know how. But, Lambert—the state of the matter is mixed so that, on my word, I hardly know what ought to be done. I must say it even here, my billy-

boy—your behaviour to your first wife was scurvy—I can't help it, scurvy is the word. And now in the light of eternity you know it, know it as well as I do, and are darned sorry for it, and would like to have it otherwise. I must take that into consideration, and do something for Theresa. That's your present desire, I could swear it. But your past wish was to provide for the second wife—so I suppose I must do something too for that rhinoceros, Jane. I'll do it—and for the kid also, I mean Alice, she's a little dear too. But I shan't let her have Curgenven. I have to consider the feelings and the wishes of all the other corpses in there along with you, Lambert, as well, and you know as well as I do that Curgenven must have as its owner a Curgenven. Alice is a darling, but she might marry a Tompkins, and then there would be a Tompkins of Curgenven. That would never do. It wouldn't be the same even if Tompkins assumed our name. No—Curgenven goes to Justinian. That's certain, and that is as it should be. My conscience will justify me in determining that. But it's other bones about the widows. How you could throw aside Theresa for Jane passes my understanding. If you had first married Jane and then kicked her over, I could have gone with you there; I'd have done it myself. And that you should have taken Theresa—that's explicable. But having Theresa, to get into harness with that kangaroo'

—he shook his head. 'The world is full of puzzles. However, I need not bother my head about that. It was done. What am I to do? For nineteen years Theresa never had a penny from you, Lambert, more shame to you, and for sixteen or seventeen Jane has been spending as much of the Curgenven money as she cared to spend. That's not fair. To be fair, Theresa should have a run on the property for sixteen or seventeen years, and then after that both go shares equally. But I can't go wholly by what is fair—I must go by the expressed intention of Lambert. There is the three hundred for the widow—that was a provision in the settlement. They shall have it turn and turn about, and toss up who is to have the first pull. I shall put away three hundred a year for Alice, to form a sum on which she may be comfortably off hereafter.'

Then there dashed down the church avenue a boy—the organ-blower released. A few minutes later Mrs. Jane Curgenven issued from the porch, with her nose in the air, turning it from side to side.

'Piff!' said she—'a very strong scent of tobacco.'

Mr. Percival at once removed his pipe and attempted to pocket it; but Mrs. Curgenven had seen him.

'Really, Percival—smoking in the churchyard!—and at the vault! Upon my word, Percival, I could not have conceived

that such a thing could be done! Have you no religious feelings—no sense of decency?'

'No harm meant, Jane.'

'But harm is done.'

'There is nothing wrong in smoking, any more than in smelling a scent-bottle.'

'There is wrong where there is indecorum. What is irreverent is profane, and what is profane is sinful.'

'I'm very sorry, Jane. I'll not do it again. I have knocked about in the West so much that I have forgotten some of the ways of civilization.'

'Of that I am well aware.'

'I say, Jane. I want a word with you. I am deadly sorry for this unfortunate business about the two Mrs. Curgenvens.'

'There is one only.'

'The two wives, you know. I have been turning about in my head what is the right thing to do with you both.'

'I do not want you to have anything to do with me,' said Mrs. Curgenven, 'and I refuse to be named in the same breath with another individual to whom you allude.'

'It is only this,' said Percival; 'that three hundred pounds per annum must go to the two wives between them, somehow.'

'If you speak like that you insult me.'

'I—I wish a score of men would insult me by offering me three hundred a year.'

'It is not that. *That* I admit I have a right to.'

'Not a right, Jane. It is true three hundred a year was the sum settled that the widow should have. But then there are *two*, you know; and I think if you could see your way to share and share about, and to toss up who should begin——'

'Mr. Percival,' said Mrs. Curgenven haughtily, 'if you mean this in joke, it speaks an obtuseness of moral sense which is deplorable. That you mean it seriously I cannot believe. Understand me for once and for all. I emphatically repudiate the notion of that abandoned woman having the smallest shadow of a right to be regarded as the wife of poor Lambert. If I submit to what my father has wished—that I waive my claim and that of my child—it is solely to spare Lambert's memory from being aspersed. Good-evening. I wish you may learn to behave respectfully to a lady before you again address her. I am—till you marry—Mrs. Curgenven. *When* you marry I am the dowager Mrs. Curgenven. Understand that, mark, and digest it.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

DRUMDUSKIE.

Theresa arrived at the little station of Drumduskie, weary and sick. She had travelled night and day; owing to having lent Mr. Percival Curgenven five shillings out of her journey money she had been too pinched to be able to obtain sufficient food on the way of a sustaining nature, and sausage-rolls and penny buns are not of a character, as supplied at refreshment stalls, to fortify the constitution to undergo a journey with hardly a break from Cornwall to Perth.

The vibrations of the train for such a continuance had, moreover, occasioned Theresa a good deal of pain in her fractured but rapidly healing collar-bone. These two causes combined to depress her spirits and damp that energy, if not vehemence of character, which naturally belonged to her.

On getting out at the little station she found no carriage

waiting for her, and no porter who could carry her box. No conveyance was kept by the station-master, and she was constrained to walk two miles to Drumduskie itself. She was disappointed and discouraged. Mrs. Boxholder knew by what train she was to arrive—she had been apprised of that; and Theresa for a moment felt uneasy lest she should have come on the wrong day. With her disengaged arm she felt in her pocket for Mrs. Boxholder's letter, opened it, and satisfied herself that she herself had made no mistake.

She accordingly walked on to Drumduskie—the first walk of any length she had taken since her accident. On reaching the front door, and learning that Mrs. Boxholder was out, but was expected in shortly, she felt relieved, as it enabled her to sit down and rest from the fatigue before encountering her future mistress.

Theresa had been too tired to notice the house and the grounds as she came up, but they made no impression of grandeur on her. The servant who admitted her asked her to be seated in the hall until the lady returned, and as Theresa recovered she looked around her. The entrance-hall was fairly large, but the ceiling was very low, and there was a mark across it as though it were compounded of two rooms knocked into one by the removal of a wall. Some antlers of stags, old Scottish claymores, and a portrait, indifferently

painted, furnished the walls, that were panelled in deal and painted to resemble oak.

Theresa remarked to the servant that her luggage was at the station, but the man doubted whether he could give orders for the boy to put the cob in the cart to fetch it before Mrs. Boxholder's return; he said he would ask her when she came in. She had gone for a constitutional walk, as the morning had been wet, and she never liked to be in all day. She had taken the young ladies with her.

After about a quarter of an hour the hall door opened, and a stout, short, sandy-whiskered gentleman, in knickerbockers and gaiters, came in. He was going through the hall to his room when he observed Theresa, came up to her, and held out his hand.

'How do you do—Mrs. Lambert, I suppose. I really hope you'll be happy here. Very glad to see you. The girls are not bad girls—when let alone. Is there anything I can do for you?'

He spoke in a very decidedly English accent, with a touch of cockneyism in it. Theresa thanked him, and mentioned her luggage.

'Oh yes, to be sure, it shall be seen to; but I'll just ask my wife first if we can have the spring-cart and the cob. I hope you'll get on well with her—but oh, here she is. I must be off;' and he skipped away into his smoking-room, nimble

as a squirrel, as the door was thrust open with a certain imperiousness of manner that seemed to imply that the door stuck, and refused to open at its peril.

Then in came a very large stout lady, tall, with an eagle nose, very light hair, and very light eyelashes and pale eyes, followed by two girls.

'Oh! the new governess. Rose, Flora, take off your things in your rooms, and don't let them litter about. Now, understand me—no littering. Remain in your rooms till I send for you down.' The girls slunk up-stairs.

'Oh! crippled!' exclaimed Mrs. Boxholder. 'My father never informed me of that. This is serious. You never mentioned when you wrote that you were deprived of the use of an arm.'

Theresa had risen on the entrance of the lady, who seemed to swell and fill the hall, and choke the doors to the different rooms and obstruct the stairs, and who at the same time scented the atmosphere with a flavour of furs and black dye. She had both hands in a very big muff. After opening the door and observing Theresa she had thrust the right hand, to join the left, into the muff, and had not offered it to the newcomer.

'I have met with an accident,' said Theresa, spots of angry fire kindling on her cheeks. 'But it will pass—I was thrown

out of a gig and broke a collar-bone, but my arm is uninjured. I shall shortly have it free once more.'

'That is well, for I shall want you to cut out. You cut out, I suppose?'

'After a fashion.'

'It must not be after *a* fashion, but after *the* fashion. Really it was too bad of my father—he should have mentioned this. It is an expensive journey from Cornwall here—cost me a lot of money; and one, of course, wishes to have some one who will answer my purpose and not be useless. I sincerely hope your collar-bone will be well speedily. You are Mrs. Lambert—brevet rank, or real?'

'I beg your pardon?'

'I mean a real widow?'

'Yes—my husband is dead.'

'Long ago?'

'Not long ago.'

'What was he? I particularly told my father that I must have a lady—a real lady by birth.'

'I am very sorry—I am not that. By birth I am nothing, less than nothing.'

'Oh, but you don't speak like—like a common person. There are reasons, family reasons, why it is essential in this house that the governess should be perfectly correct in her

intonation, absolutely free from all dialectic peculiarities—of course excepting a slight touch of Scottish, to which I should not object. That there should be a strong counteracting influence to—let us say cockney twang—is, unfortunately, most important. I am glad you have not that.'

'I was thoroughly well educated by the kindest and most refined of ladies.'

'I am sorry about your birth; but your husband, what was he?'

'He was a captain in the navy.'

'In the commercial service, I suppose?'

'No, in her Majesty's navy.'

'Oh—that is something. No children?'

'No children at all.'

'I see you don't wear a widow's cap. I suppose you thought it as well not—as a governess. I have never seen a governess in a widow's cap, and—so it is best not. I suppose you have a pension from Government?'

'I have none.'

'How is that? Your husband in her Majesty's service, as captain, and you his widow, and no pension! I don't understand it. I thought that always—but I'll call Drumduskie. No, I'll go to him and consult about this—it is odd. By the way, I suppose you are hungry; you shall have some tea.

I think before anything is absolutely settled I'll consult Drumduskie.'

Mr. Boxholder had been a London cornfactor. His mother had been a McNaught of Drumduskie. The McNaughts of Drumduskie were inconsiderable—something between farmers and lairds; but when the McNaught property came to the cornfactor, Mrs. Boxholder insisted on his retiring from business on the respectable fortune he had made, and setting up as a Scottish laird at Drumduskie. He himself was a plain man, with no pretence, who was happy in his commercial world, and found it difficult to fit himself for the new sphere into which he was plunged by the dominant will of his wife. She always spoke and wrote of him as Drumduskie; his Christian name, happily, was McNaught, so there was just a flavour of Scotland about him. Her persistence in converting the cornfactor into laird of Drumduskie amused the neighbours, annoyed her husband, but caused unbounded admiration in the bosoms of all the Pamphlet family, which flattered itself that it had two of its female members well married, one into an ancient Cornish squirearchical family, seated on its ancestral acres from prehistoric times—certainly from before the Conquest; the other into a Scottish family of patriarchal dignity and manners, with its proper tartan, of course, and its clan, its bagpipes, its own Drumduskie march, and its

devoted adherents among the lower classes, who would die cheerfully for Drumduskie their chief. If Mrs. Boxholder could have had her way in every point she would have put the cornfactor into a kilt and bared his knees; but though he was a yielding man to her in many, indeed in most matters, in this he was obdurate; he tried to split the difference by wearing a very loud plaid suit, but this did not content madam, and she was now engaged in girding at him to join the Highland militia, so as to have some occasions in which he could wear the kilt and flourish his bare knees, and some excuse for appearing in his uniform on official and festal occasions; some justification for being painted, with a sheep-dog at his side—not for the hall, as that was too low to receive so large a portrait, but for the drawing-room, which had been built on to the old house by Mrs. Boxholder to suit modern tastes, and her ideas as to what a reception-room of the Lady of Drumduskie should be.

Presently Mrs. Boxholder returned into the hall, and said to Theresa, 'I should like to know the reason why you are not in receipt of a pension.'

'Mr. Pamphlet knew the reason, and was quite satisfied. But I am not sure that I have any claim on Government, as my husband left the navy.'

'Oh!' exclaimed the lady, 'that was it. That did not occur to me. He left it voluntarily, of course.'

'Perfectly voluntarily.'

'And he was a gentleman by birth?'

'He was.'

'Well, I hope all will be well. I relied on my father, who is a most admirable man, and who, I have no doubt, would send me no one objectionable, though I own I was surprised that Mrs. Curgenven made no reply when I wrote to her. She does not know you, I suppose.'

'I believe that on one occasion she saw me—know me she certainly does not.'

'Well, we will hope for the best. You must be very particular about the girls being tidy. Flora has a way of coming down late for prayers, and scrambling through her dressing, and not always using her toothbrush; you must see to that. Rose is wonderfully clever at everything but self-adornment. I have had to complain repeatedly of holes in her stockings. Now you are here, mind, plenty of toothbrush for Flora, and no stocking-holes for Rose. By the way, it was a long and expensive journey. I suppose you must be hungry. I'll have in some tea. Oh! and perhaps you would like to see your room. I'll ring and send a maid with you.'

Then Mrs. Boxholder went to her husband.

'Drumduskie, I believe it is right. Her husband left the navy. That is why there is no widow's pay. I'll send for her luggage. I did not on purpose order a trap to meet her; it is as well at once to impress it on a new-comer that she is to take a subservient place—must expect to be overlooked. It produces an effect at once, without a word, you understand, Drumduskie.'

'Quite so, my dear; no one understands the art of snub better than yourself.'

'You are very rude. It is particularly hard to get people to know their places. You, for instance, need continual reminders to occupy your proper position. Some folks have to be poked up, others to be thrust down.'

Theresa was shown to her bedroom. There was no fire burning in the grate—none was laid. None apparently had been laid in it, or certainly kindled, since the grate was put in, for the fire-bricks at the back were not blackened.

The room was not uncomfortable. It looked to the north, and had a small window. It was furnished with everything that was necessary and nothing beyond, save a bookcase, in which were books of old divinity—Blair's Sermons, Leighton on St. Peter, and a few dreary memoirs of very dull good men, who never did anything interesting in their lives, who never

did anything at all, to judge from their biographies, except write letters full of piety, written under the sense that they were some day to be published.

Theresa seated herself on the bed, and waited for her box to arrive. She was tired and discouraged. The phase of life on which she was entering seemed to her the worst with which experience had made her acquainted. There was no help for it, she must remain at Drumduskie to be browbeaten by this woman, to be made to work as a slave. She could not leave; she had no money to carry her anywhere, and wherever she went she must do something to earn her bread. Was one way much worse than another, now that the artistic career was closed to her? In that artistic career, along with much that was objectionable there was change, there was a certain freedom, and there was enthusiasm for art to carry her along. In this occupation she had undertaken there might, indeed, be interests if her pupils were attractive girls, with warm hearts and well-developed intelligences. If they were apt to learn she would find an interest in teaching, if they were ready to love she would find a delight in gaining their affection.

She must avoid Mrs. Boxholder as much as possible. The lady was a bustling person, who would probably have much to occupy her, and that would keep her out of the school-room.

Theresa recalled the strange proposal of Mr. Percival Cur-

genven through the carriage-window, and did not know what to make of it. Was he in earnest, or was it 'chaff'? He had lived much in the Far West—gone cattle-ranching, gold-digging; he had mixed with all kinds of persons in the Western States, and had fallen into an offhand, rollicking manner; he said things he meant seriously in a joking manner, and he made his jokes without a muscle moving—what he meant Theresa did not know. She placed no great confidence in his sincerity when he spoke. If he really did wish her hand, he would write. If he did not write then she might conclude that what he shouted through the window was a bit of his nonsense. She put the thought of Percival from her mind, to think only of her present position, and of the duties she had undertaken.

Weary with her long journey, and sick and faint with hunger, she sank on the bed and fell asleep. She was awakened by the maid and the groom entering with her box.

'Here you are, miss, and please—when you've tidied yourself a bit, your hair, and washed—missus says you are to come down to tea.'

Theresa, stupid with sleep, raised her head from the pillow and said, 'I want nothing.'

'Lor!' exclaimed the maid; 'if missus says you are to eat, eat you must. No one here can do what they like; they must

do what missus orders, so clean yourself a bit and come down.' The groom had left the room.

'Lor! you poor creetur,' said the maid. 'Well, now, if you haven't been crying! And you've a bad arm. Come, give me the key, and I'll unpack your box for you, missus notwithstanding, who said I wasn't to do nothing of the kind, so as you mightn't come to expect to be waited upon.'

CHAPTER XIX.

IN A SITUATION.

NEXT day Theresa made acquaintance with her pupils. Of these Rose, the elder, was supposed by her mother, and supposed herself, to be highly accomplished. She was to be finished. Flora, the younger, was admitted to be backward, and to need teaching from the rudiments. Rose was, her mother bade Theresa observe, a beauty of a striking and exceptional character. She was, in fact, not bad-looking, but to an unprejudiced eye would not be accounted beautiful. She had her mother's nose; she was supercilious, and did not believe that anything she could be taught would improve her —anything, that is to say, which a forty pound governess could teach. A music-master at a guinea a lesson might give her a hint that would improve her touch, and a Parisian governess at a hundred per annum might assist her in acquir-

ing fluency in French. Theresa found that her attempts to instruct Rose were received with stolid contempt. Rose played the piano without feeling, she sang out of tune, her French pronunciation was execrable, and she knew nothing of Italian or German, and because she knew nothing of these languages held their literature to be sovereignly stupid, and entirely beneath consideration.

Flora was in face like her father, sandy of hair, irregular of feature, with more flesh on her face than bone and muscle. She was an uninteresting child, listless in manner, unintelligent, and though not unamiable, yet incapable of appreciating affection. She was obedient, but gave little promise of her studies leading to any other result than the exhaustion of the powers and patience of her teacher. Rose, Theresa found, was ready to be actively disagreeable; Flora to be passively uninteresting.

The weather was wet. The rain had come on during the night, and a steady downpour lasted all day.

The governess and children had luncheon with Mr. and Mrs. Boxholder in the dining-room at one o'clock. After lunch the lady of the house told Rose to be ready to drive with her that afternoon to pay a few obligatory visits.

'You, Mrs. Lambert, will take Flora out for a walk.'

'In the rain?' asked Theresa.

'We always take constitutionals in this family, whatever the weather be. You have, of course, an umbrella?'

'Yes, I have one.'

'And a waterproof?'

'I am sorry to say I have not.'

'Then you will be wet through. No one should come to Scotland without a waterproof. Knowledge is only to be acquired by experience. After a sousing rain in Perthshire, and getting wet to the bone, you will remember to the end of your life to have a waterproof with you when you come to Scotland. I make a point of my children taking exercise every day, for an hour at least. Let me see, you do not know the country. Suppose you go as far as the Seven Dubs. Flora —the Seven Dubs to-day; you will show your governess the way; and tell me on your return what observable things you have seen in the hedges, in the sky, on the road. Remember the story of "Eyes and no Eyes." Mrs. Lambert, you will direct the child's attention to everything that may improve her mind and ought to arrest her attention and quicken observation, to everything that may be encountered *en route* to Seven Dubs and back—except, of course, men.'

The carriage was driven to the front door to receive Mrs. Boxholder and her eldest daughter. The former was in the hall before Rose had come down.

'Mrs. Lambert,' said thelady, 'you will see I always take Miss Boxholder about with me. I cannot trust her with any one whom I do not know and on whom I cannot rely. You know she is so very attractive—such a beauty; and there are all sorts of persons about the roads—people from the South, tourists, and what not, concerning whom one knows nothing; and a lively girl and an heiress—for she will inherit Drumduskie, as well as her father's wealth from other sources—must be guarded most carefully. Some day or other, perhaps, I may let her go out a walk with you—not to-day. You will remember to cultivate the mind and form the taste of Miss Flora on your constitutional.'

When Mrs. Boxholder had driven off with Rose, Theresa stood in the porch looking despondingly at the rain, holding her small umbrella in the only hand she could use. She had a light lady's cloak, too light to resist the rain.

Then Mr. Boxholder appeared in the hall, looking about him.

'Miss Lambert,' said he, 'I cannot really permit you to get drenched. Of course you must take the hour's walk, as my wife has ordered it; but you positively must wear some protection against the weather. I think—perhaps I might venture—I am sure my wife has got a waterproof, and I have no doubt we can get it shaken out and dried before she returns, and so she will know nothing about it having been used.'

'Oh, thank you most kindly,' said Theresa. 'I should not venture to put on anything of hers without her permission.'

'Perhaps you are right. Yes. It would be awkward were it not dried in time and hung up in its accustomed place, and she were to discover—upon my word I don't know what we should do. Now consider this. I have a light waterproof overcoat. It won't in the least matter your wearing that. No one will be on the road—not a carter, even—in this detestable weather. Will you excuse me, and put on my overcoat? 'Pon my word it won't look amiss, and it will keep you dry as snuff.'

'Really, Mr. Boxholder, you are most kind; but——'

'But, positively it does my heart good to be called plain Boxholder, and not lairded and Drumdruskied. You won't?—well, go out in this rain unprotected you shall not. Let me see! The gig umbrella! no, that is too heavy for you to hold up. I have it, my tartan—the Drumduskie plaid excogitated by her ladyship. Spread it out and use it as a shawl. Bless you! if she does see it has been rained upon she'll be as pleased as Punch, thinking I have been out figuring in my tartan. She'll never fancy you wore it. And I'll take a turn afterwards round the garden in it, and then, with a white conscience, swear I wore it.'

The good-natured cornfactor would take no refusal: he enveloped Theresa in the plaid.

'There,' said he, 'that's first-rate. Don't you be afraid that Flora will peach. Not she. She's too much afraid of mammy; ain't you, Flora?'

Then back into his smoking-room dived Drumduskie, and Theresa and her pupil sallied forth into the rain.

It was not possible through the veil of descending raindrops to see anything of the landscape, or much in the hedges, on which to comment for the illumination and nutriment of the pupil's mind; and of travellers along the road there were none.

'What are the Seven Dubs?' asked Theresa.

'I don't know,' answered Flora.

'But you know where they are?'

'Yes—I think so.'

'Are there seven anythings there?'

'I'm sure I don't know. But please, Mrs. Lambert, don't ask me questions. Mamma said I was to inquire of you, and not be put off, she said, by being questioned myself.'

Days and weeks passed at Drumduskie. Days not always wet; but fair as well as wet, all went in the house in the same routine of lessons, meals, and walks. Flora was catechized by her mother every few days, and then Theresa was lectured by

her on the disappointment occasioned by the slow progress made by the unfortunate child.

'The talents are there,' said Mrs. Boxholder, tapping the low dull brow of the girl; 'they have to be brought out. That is your work. That is what is expected of you, Mrs. Lambert. She is a Drumduskie, and therefore cannot be a fool, and no folly, I can assure you, comes to her from the Pamphlets. The Pamphlets are a remarkably active-minded family. No—the faculties are locked in the child, and what we want is to have them drawn out. I am sorry that so far, somehow, you do not seem to have hit on the right system, or have gone the wrong way to work—Flora does not seem to me to have got on a bit.'

Again and again did Theresa ask herself whether it would be possible for her to endure the slavery in this house for an entire twelvemonth. She was forced to exercise over herself the greatest control when her blood boiled up at the insolence of the woman who was mistress of the place. The poor girl Flora cowered before her mother—was worried by her into stupidity or sullenness. She really had few abilities, unhappily she had no more lovableness in her than exists in a bit of putty; yet Mr. Boxholder loved best this his youngest, and sought occasion to show her fondness, unobserved by his wife, who rebuked him when she detected him with Flora, as spoiling

the girl, and distracting her mind from her lessons. There was no escape possible for Theresa—she had no money, and must remain at Drumduskie, and endure what was put on her, till she had earned sufficient to enable her to leave. She had, moreover, more than half engaged to stay the twelve-month with the Boxholders when an arrangement had been made relative to her going there.

A month passed before a line reached her from Mr. Percival Curgenven, and that was a mere apology for not having returned the borrowed five shillings earlier. The matter had escaped his recollection, he said, owing to the press of affairs on his attention consequent on his entering on possession of the estate. He did enclose a post-office order for a crown, and for a crown only. He had apparently forgotten his offer of three hundred pounds, and also his offer of himself.

The receipt of this letter a little disappointed Theresa. She was too sensible to allow that she had a right to feel real disappointment, and yet under the depressing atmosphere of Drumduskie this did somewhat weigh on her spirits. She had built no sort of hopes on the offer that had been made her, but she felt that she had a right to be hurt at the frivolous and inconsiderate manner in which she had been treated—an offer made her, flung through a carriage-window, and he who made the offer never troubling himself to know

whether it were accepted or not, and apparently not himself concerning whether it had been taken seriously or as a joke.

After a while Theresa was able to use her left arm again. The nearest surgeon was called in to advise when she might discard the sling. 'But you understand,' said Mrs. Boxholder, 'he will send in his account for professional attendance to you, Mrs. Lambert. We do not pay the bills of our governesses, or they would be always shamming sickness, and running up tremendous accounts. They cost us enough as it is.'

Some trouble arose occasionally from Mr. Boxholder being discovered in the school-room, or from his exchanging a few words with Theresa, whom he insisted on designating *Miss*, though corrected repeatedly by his wife. He went into the school-room to see his favourite child, kiss her and encourage her; and he spoke to Theresa when he had an opportunity, out of kindliness of heart. At table at meals he might not look across at her, or in any other direction than his wife, or address any observations to Theresa. To do so provoked unpleasantnesses.

Theresa was surprised at first to find that the servants in the house were English. By degrees the reason came out. Mrs. Boxholder so worried her domestics that no Scotch girls

would remain with her, and she was obliged to obtain her servants from England, and from a great distance, so as to ensure their remaining in their places. By this means she had them at her mercy, or, to be more correct, at her disposal, for at least six months, owing to the expense of the return journey to England. The two girls, Rose and Flora, had, moreover, gone through the hands of a succession of governesses, who had had the moulding of them each for a very brief space; either Mrs. Boxholder had made life at Drumduskie unendurable to the ladies, and they had thrown up the situation, or the lady had bundled them off because they did not prove tractable under her objurgations. The systems under which the girls had been taught varied with their governesses. One held by 'Maugnall's Questions' and Blair's 'Compendium of the Sciences'; another followed the last approved methods of the schools. One grounded and another topped; one went upon the system of making all instruction palatable, teaching history through James's and Scott's Novels, and geography through imaginary voyages; another by reducing all instruction to bare bones, making of it a hard list of names and dates and unpalatable and indigestible facts.

Theresa found that the fresh air of Scotland was restoring her strength, her spirits, and that vigour of mind which had

carried her through her life hitherto, but which had given way temporarily under sickness and disappointment. Her blood began to circulate faster, her eye resumed its fire, and as her health was restored, with it came a combative spirit that ill-brooked the overbearing manners of Mrs. Boxholder. That lady little knew how nearly she drove her governess to an outbreak; but Theresa had acquired self-control in her professional career, and she was able to restrain herself under provocation, and await her own convenience for leaving Drumduskie. She was well aware that if she departed before six months were up Mrs. Boxholder would withdraw from her salary the sum that the journey had cost from Liskeard to Perth.

END OF VOL. I.

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